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**Constructing Gender and Locality in Late Medieval England
The Lives of Anglo-Saxon and British Female Saints in the South English Legendaries**

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Constructing Gender and Locality in Late Medieval England:
The Lives of Anglo-Saxon and British Female Saints
in the *South English Legendaries*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of gender and locality in late medieval England through the lives of Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the *South English Legendaries* (*SELS*). Focusing on a distinctive characteristic of the *SELS*, the inclusion of native saints, it examines a group of native female saints in the British Isles, who appear in the fourteenth and fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *SELS*. All female saints covered in this study were monastic women, who were nuns and abbesses, from various parts of England and Wales, living between the seventh and tenth centuries. The thesis, consisting of five chapters, explores the *vitae* of these saints in turn, namely Frideswide of Oxford, Æthelthryth of Ely, Mildred of Minster-in-Thanet, Edburga of Winchester, and Winifred of Gwytherin, focusing on topics distinctive to each *vita*. Through reading their *vitae*, this study aims to shed light on aspects of gender, and particularly virginity, of these medieval female saints, analysing various literary motifs such as enclosure, incorrupt bodies, and danger of rape. By comparison with classical virgin martyr legends, it examines how the virginity of medieval insular women in some ways followed but at others most significantly departed from the classical models in order to present a new form of female sanctity. This thesis is not only a detailed study exploring medieval English abbesshood in hagiography, but also provides insights into the roles of the *vitae* of native female saints in the formation of localities and nationality, looking at issues such as the translation of relics and local cult activities. Given that the *SELS* are one of the post-Conquest hagiographic collections, that aimed to present saints from Anglo-Saxon, British, Irish, or Celtic backgrounds, as ‘English’ saints, this study demonstrates how the *SELS* present a late medieval view of the nation composed of various localities of saints.

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I read the *SELS* for the first time in 2009 when I was a MA student at Durham University, working on the saints' legends of the Katherine Group. Almost overwhelmed by the amount of previous research on the Katherine Group, my supervisor, Professor Neil Cartlidge, suggested that I consider the *SELS* as a possible topic for my Ph.D. Although I still had to read the overwhelming amount of secondary literature relating to the *SELS*, I was fortunate to have been given this topic for my long term project and to be working on it to this day without losing my passion. Having moved to King's, I have been more than fortunate to work under my two supervisors. My interest in female saints began when I read academic works by Dr Sarah Salih. As

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Introduction

1. Female Saints in the *SELS*

‘Why are not all women saints even if they are virtuous enough?’ – A late thirteenth-century poet raises this question about female saints in one of the *temporale* texts of the *South English Legendaries* (*SELS*). What he insists on is the superiority of women over men in terms of their chastity:

And hou is hit þen of wommen, þat men blameþ hem so
In songis and in rimis, and in bokis þerto,
To segge þat hy fals beþ, and iuyl also to ileue,
Vikel ek and leþir inouh³, mony mon to greue?
...
Where wostou so stable mon, þat 3if a fayr woman come,
Gent and hende, and hym bysou3t of folye ilome
Þat he nolde torne his þou3t to folye at fyne?
For 3if he ne dede me wold hym holde worþy to ligge in crine.
And what is þan þe woman worþe, as þe meste del beþ,
Þat ne beþ ouercome mid no biddyng, as we often iseþ?
3he ne chal be no seint iholde, as alle stille hit chal be;
What reson is in þis manere? Day þat hit conne ise! (ll. 27-43)¹

The text is called the ‘Defence of Women’, somewhat digressively inserted into the

¹ Quotations from the ‘Defence of Women’ are taken from O. S. Pickering, ‘The “Defence of Women” from the *Southern Passion*: A New Edition’, in *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment*, ed. by Klaus P. Jankofsky (Tübingen: Francke, 1992), pp. 154-76 (pp. 167-76). For a modern English translation, see Alcuin Blamires, trans., ‘The Southern Passion’, in Blamires, ed., with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 244-49.

The text of the ‘Defence of Women’ is also incorporated into Beatrice Daw Brown’s EETS edition of the *Southern Passion*, based on Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys 2344. See her *The Southern Passion, edited from Pepysian MS. 2344 in the Library of Magdalene College, Cambridge*, EETS, OS 169 (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), ll. 1899-1990 and pp. 99-100, n. 1958.

Southern Passion, after the episode of Mary Magdalene. Starting from the episode in which Jesus first appears to the woman, known as Mary Magdalene, after the resurrection, the author launches arguments for protecting medieval women from his contemporary misogynistic and anti-feminist discourses.² As the modern title indicates, this text is categorised into the medieval genre called the defence of women, well-known in the works of Christine de Pizan and exemplified by Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*, which develop pro-women arguments against the long-standing medieval misogyny of the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, and vernacular narratives such as the *Roman de la Rose*.³ Just as with challenges made by other pro-women writers, the *Southern Passion* poet's target of criticism in his 'Defence of Women' exposes the sexual double standards in medieval society.

These double standards in men and women, especially regarding men and women's chastity within the framework of secular marriage, are similarly criticised in the works of Jerome and Christine de Pizan, as well as in *Dives and Pauper*, but it is more remarkable that the poet of the *Southern Passion* uses a metaphor of a saint, stating that men are applauded as though they are saints who 'ligge in crine' (l. 38) if they display virtues, such as chastity and steadfastness, which women are always expected to exhibit.⁴ Then he raises the question cited at the beginning of this chapter, complaining about the paucity of female saints. This also reflects the nature of the *SELS*, to which this text belongs, as is suggested by some of their manuscripts' positive

² Pickering, 'The "Defence of Women"', p. 154.

³ Blamires, ed., *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp. 1-15.

⁴ On the defence of women in the works of Jerome, Christine de Pizan, and *Dives and Pauper*, see Blamires, ed., *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 244; pp. 76-77; pp. 260-70; pp. 278-302.

attitudes towards collecting more lives of female saints, and especially from the medieval British Isles. Although they were still a minority, statistical research shows that the number of holy women increased during the Middle Ages.⁵ Vernacular hagiographic collections such as the *SELS* certainly reflect a growing interest in commemorating female saints of their insular past. This study aims to shed light on the narratives of such women which newly emerged in late medieval hagiographic collections.

Over the past few decades, the focus on female saints from the perspectives of gender and sexuality studies has provoked active discussions and immensely furthered the critical history of medieval hagiography. The legends of virgin martyrs have been the main focus of this emerging research. Along with the elucidation of medieval concepts of virginity and the theorisation of them, scholars such as Karen A. Winstead, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, and Sarah Salih reread the legends of virgin martyrs of late antiquity in light of the corporeality of virgin saints and revealed the construction of female virginity in the Middle Ages.⁶ Their approaches have brought gendered

⁵ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 220-21; Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500-1100', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 102-25 (pp. 103-4). See also Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 63-64.

⁶ Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Winstead, ed. and trans., *Chaste Passions: Medieval English Virgin Martyr Legends* (New York: Cornell University, 2000); Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture, c. 1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001). See also Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000); Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Salih, eds, *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003); Bernau, *Virgins: A Cultural History* (London: Granta Books, 2007).

perspectives into reading the *vitae* of female saints which are also applicable to reading the *vitae* of relatively newer saints: the nuns and abbesses of the Middle Ages. What this thesis aims to do is to situate readings of the Middle English *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the aforementioned context of critical discussions on female sanctity in medieval hagiography, focusing on local rather than universal saints.

The emergence of the *vitae* of holy nuns and abbesses reflects the foundations and dissemination of nunneries in the early Middle Ages. In the *vitae* of classical holy women, although there are sometimes references to earlier forms of monasteries for women, the lack of spiritual institutions often causes them to lead ascetic lives in the desert, with assistance from male clerics, as seen in the *vitae* of Thaïs and Mary of Egypt, or to live as monks in monasteries by concealing their gender identity, as is often the case with female transvestite saints.⁷ The foundation of nunneries gives women the option of pursuing a spiritual life, an option available to Anglo-Saxon and British women too. Their *vitae* characteristically feature holy women under institutions and offer narratives more rooted in specific areas.

The *vitae* of such monastic women are often read historically.⁸ Unlike classical female saints, some of whom are often regarded as fictional, medieval monastic

⁷ For example, a transvestite saint, Euphrosyne, in her Old English *vita*, chooses a monastery for men rather than for women, so that her father cannot find her. Thaïs is shut in a cell in a monastery of virgins. See, for the *vita* of Euphrosyne, Walter W. Skeat, ed. and trans., *Aelfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saint's Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, EETS, OS 76, 2 vols (London: N. Trübner, 1881-1900), II, p. 342-43; for Thaïs, William Granger Ryan, trans., *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), II, pp. 234-35 (p. 235).

⁸ Schulenburg, 'Saints' Lives as a Source for the History of Women, 500-1100', in *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. by Joel T. Rosenthal (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 285-320; *Forgetful of their Sex*, pp. 17-57; Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

women are more likely to be historical figures, who are also attested to by witnesses in other historical documents such as charters. As scholars read them as historical sources, their *vitae*, especially in Latin, provide an early medieval history of particular monasteries, as well as biographies of individual royal women.

While these historical studies contribute to shedding light on early medieval religious women, it is also important to note that these saints' lives depicted in vernacular hagiography are representations in late medieval England. Considering the temporal difference between pre-Conquest England, when these saints lived and died, and post-Conquest England, when their *vitae* were written, the vernacular *vitae* of early monastic women should also be assessed from literary perspectives as narratives suggesting how late medieval hagiography adapted them for their contemporary audience. Wogan-Browne and Salih analyse literatures of monastic women, including *vitae* of nuns and abbesses, in their discussions of monastic virginites.⁹ Although the representation of virginity is one of the most important themes in the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the *SELS*, this thesis focuses on the whole structures of their narratives, including various tropes such as the theme of virginity inherited from the *vitae* of classical virgin martyrs. Even though they are set in the pre-Conquest past, Middle English *vitae* reflect their contemporary English context in various ways. Along with historical and archaeological studies on late medieval nunneries, the literary analysis of these *vitae* can also provide insights into late medieval views on religious women.¹⁰

⁹ On nuns' virginity, see Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 107-65; on abbesses' virginity, see Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, pp. 189-222.

¹⁰ On historical and archaeological studies on medieval nunneries, see Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922); Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval*

Furthermore, the study of Anglo-Saxon and British female saints importantly bring to light a new form of female piety. The piety of medieval religious women is theorised by Caroline Walker Bynum in her studies of religious women on the continent in the high and late Middle Ages.¹¹ Bynum's arguments have been so influential that they can also be applied to monastic women in the *SELS*, who were insular and earlier medieval examples of holy women.¹² In this thesis, I will examine whether or not the Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the *SELS* fit into Bynum's category of pious women. On the one hand, the situations of early medieval insular women are different from those of late medieval continental women on whom Bynum focuses in her discussions. Samantha J. E. Riches and Salih point out that some Anglo-Saxon and British female saints, founding abbesses such as Hild, and holy queens such as Margaret of Scotland, are closer to what Weinstein and Bell call a 'masculine' type of saint, who was a holder of social and ecclesiastical power, rather than Bynum's 'feminine' model.¹³ Similarly, all five monastic women in the *SELS* were of noble

France (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women I: Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); *Veiled Women II: Female Religious Communities in England, 871-1066* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994).

On the literary approaches to saints' legends, see *Sanctity as Literature in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. by Eva von Contzen and Anke Bernau (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

¹¹ For example, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

¹² For example, see Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the 'South English Legendary'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 143-53.

¹³ Riches and Salih, 'Introduction: Gender and Holiness: Performance and Representation in

birth, having both secular and ecclesiastical authority as royal nuns, queens, abbesses, and foundresses, and thus can rather be categorised as a masculine type. On the other hand, given that they are late medieval representations of early medieval women, in the process of writing their lives into hagiography in late medieval England, some of those ‘masculine’ women might also be gendered and feminised according to the category of feminine piety in their *vitae*. The *SEL vitae* of insular women present a mixture of masculinity, which comes from early medieval women’s status, and femininity of their late medieval narratives.

The *SELS* form one of the largest hagiographic collections in Middle English, and include a wide range of different types of saints. Compiled in the late thirteenth century, they were widely circulated in manuscripts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The large number of surviving manuscripts indicates that the *SELS*, considered together, comprise one of the most widely-read literary works in late medieval England. There are sixty-five manuscripts, including fragments: twenty-five major manuscripts, nineteen fragments, and eighteen miscellanies containing a single item from the *SELS*, as listed by Manfred Görlach; a manuscript was later added by Görlach and O. S. Pickering (New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS Takamiya 54); and two manuscripts were added by Thomas R. Liskka (London, British Library, Harley MS 874; London, British Library, Additional MS 62998).¹⁴ Despite

the Later Middle Ages’, in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. by Riches and Salih (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-8 (p. 5). Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 236-37.

¹⁴ See Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘South English Legendary’* (Leeds: The University of Leeds School of English, 1974), pp. viii-xi; Pickering and Görlach, ‘A Newly-Discovered Manuscript of the *South English Legendary*’, *Anglia*, 100 (1982), 109-23; Liskka, ‘The Dragon in the *SEL*: Judas, Pilate, and the “A (1)” Redaction’, *Modern Philology*, 100.1 (2002), 50-59 (pp. 50-51, n. 2). See also Blurton and Wogan-Browne, ‘Rethinking the *SELS*’, in *Rethinking the ‘SELS’*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp.

their wide reception throughout the Middle Ages, however, the *SELS* had not received the critical attention they deserve until recently. While there are a certain number of manuscript studies focused on the *SELS*, namely Manfred Görlach's foundational work published in 1974, *The Textual Tradition of the 'South English Legendary'*, which catalogues almost all the manuscripts, the *SELS* have not been discussed from the perspectives of literary and cultural analysis until very recently, with a few exceptions.¹⁵ The paucity of previous research is partly related to problems with the existing critical editions. There are two EETS editions, Carl Horstmann's *The Early 'South-English Legendary'* published in 1887 and Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill's *The 'South English Legendary'* published in 1956, but, as I discuss further below, these editions are based on only a few select manuscripts of the more than sixty manuscripts and it is difficult to grasp the great variety of manuscripts and texts of the *SELS*.¹⁶ At the same time, however, it is also true that the *SELS* have attracted growing academic interest. In 2011, two significant volumes of essays on the *SELS* were published. Kimberly K. Bell and Julie Nelson Couch published a collection focused on one of the manuscripts of the *SELS*. Many of the essays in their volume discuss not only the work itself but also in relation to other vernacular works, the Middle English

3-19 (p. 15, n. 2); Blanton, 'Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers', pp. 247-48, n. 5.

¹⁵ Klaus P. Jankofsky, ed., *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment* (Tübingen: Francke, 1992); Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the 'South English Legendary'*.

On the critical history of the *SELS* up to 2000, see John D. Scahill, with the assistance of Margaret Rogerson, *Middle English Saints' Legends*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature, VIII (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 39-75.

¹⁶ D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'South English Legendary'*, EETS, OS 235, 236, and 244, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1956-1959); Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'South-English Legendary', or Lives of Saints: I. MS. Laud, 108, in Bodleian Library*, EETS, OS 87 (London: N. Trübner, 1887).

romances of *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, included in the same manuscript.¹⁷ *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, edited by Heather Blurton and Wogan-Browne, marked a significant turning point in the critical history of this hagiographic collection, providing various readings of some of the texts from the *SELS*.¹⁸ Together, these studies have opened up opportunities for wide-ranging discussions, as well as providing various methodologies for reading the *SELS*.

Middle English hagiographic collections often treat so-called 'universal' and 'local' saints together. In the *SELS*, there are both universal (pan-European and mostly classical) and local (medieval insular) saints in most of the major manuscripts. On universal saints, Catherine Cubitt defines them as the saints 'whose cult transcended regional boundaries and exclusive monastic affiliations and was widely celebrated through the early medieval West'.¹⁹ One of the representative collections of universal saints' legends, for instance, is the *Legenda aurea*, written by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth century. This Latin work was so influential that many late medieval English hagiographers rewrote and translated it, sometimes from vernacular translation, into their collections of saints.²⁰ These universal saints represent a major

¹⁷ Bell and Nelson Couch, eds, *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108: The Shaping of English Vernacular Narrative* (Lieden: Brill, 2011).

¹⁸ Blurton and Wogan-Browne, eds, *Rethinking the 'SELS'*.

¹⁹ Cubitt, 'Universal and Local Saints in Anglo-Saxon England', *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 423-53 (p. 423).

²⁰ On the *Legenda aurea*, see *Legenda aurea: vulgo historia lombardica dicta*, ed. by Johann Georg Theodor Graesse (Lipzig: Arnold, 1850). For an English translation, see Ryan, trans., *The Golden Legend*. On the dissemination of *Legenda aurea*, see Sherry Reames, *The 'Legenda aurea': A Reexamination of its Paradoxical History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). On the influence of *Legenda aurea* on the *SELS*, see Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998), pp. 25-57.

part of the hagiography compiled in medieval England.

While universal saints were celebrated throughout Europe, local saints were rooted in more limited, circumscribed areas, in my discussion here, the medieval British Isles.²¹ The characteristic of compiling local saints together with universal saints from late antiquity and from the continent in the *SELS* reflects tendencies seen in other hagiographic collections after the Conquest. They often show their interest in composing the *vitae* of saints from Anglo-Saxon, British, Irish, or Celtic backgrounds in order to present them as ‘English’ saints.

The *SELS* contain a number of medieval native saints, both male and female. According to Katherine J. Lewis, the selection of native saints in late medieval English hagiography tends to be ‘masculine’.²² She investigates the addition of Anglo-Saxon saints in Middle English hagiographic collections, such as *Gilte Legende* and Caxton’s translation of the *Golden Legend*. As far as these two works are concerned, while there are many male Anglo-Saxon saints, such as Chad, Cuthbert, Kenelm, Swithun, Edward the Martyr, and Edward the Confessor, the only female saints included are Frideswide and a Welsh saint, Winifred, in the supplementary *Gilte Legende*.²³

²¹ There is, of course, no clear distinction between universal and local saints. For example, Bridget of Ireland is considered a local saint, venerated in Kildare, Ireland; but at the same time, because her popularity spread over the continent, she can also be called a ‘universally’ celebrated saint.

²² Lewis, ‘Anglo-Saxon Saints’ Lives, History and National Identity in Late Medieval England’, p. 169.

²³ Lewis, ‘Anglo-Saxon Saints’ Lives, History and National Identity in Late Medieval England’, pp. 169-170.

On *Gilte Legende*, see Richard Hamer, ed., with the assistance of Vida Russell, *Gilte Legende*, EETS, OS 327 and 328, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006-2007); Hamer and Vida Russell, eds, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the ‘Gilte Legende’*, EETS, OS 315 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Bokenham's Abbotsford *Legenda aurea* can also be added to this investigation, because it contains two female native saints, Æthelthryth and Winifred, out of thirteen English saints.²⁴

Considering this tendency, the inclusion of native saints, especially female saints, is one of the distinct characteristics of the *SELS*. In the *SELS*, there are eight Anglo-Saxon and British female saints: Ursula, Helena, Bridget of Kildare, Winifred of Gwytherin, Frideswide of Oxford, Æthelthryth of Ely, Mildred of Minster-in-Thamet, and Edburga of Winchester. Among them, this thesis focuses on the medieval monastic women celebrated in specific, local areas of the British Isles: Frideswide, Æthelthryth, Mildred, Edburga, and Winifred. Helena and Ursula, whom this study does not include, were from Roman Britain: Helena, empress and mother of Constantine the Great, was only allegedly born in Britain, and Ursula was a princess in third-century Brittany. Following the British literary tradition, the *SEL vita* of Helena begins with 'Saynt Elyn was in Bretayn born' (l. 1), although her *vita* is mainly concerned with the life of Silvester, who baptizes Helena, rather than herself.²⁵ The *vita* of Ursula, who is a leader of the eleven thousand virgin martyrs, characteristically depicts a female community conjoined in faith, which can be read as a prototype of *vitae* of medieval monastic women. In the *SEL vita*, Ursula plays a similar role to an abbess in a group of the eleven thousand virgins. On their way to Cologne, the *SEL vita* describes that Ursula's community spends its time singing, eating, and undertaking military training

²⁴ Simon Horobin, 'Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Work of Osbern Bokenham', *Speculum*, 82 (2007), 932-49 (p. 932 and p. 935).

²⁵ On the *SEL vita* of Helena, see Antonina Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 183-92.

on a ship to prepare for their glorious martyrdom.²⁶ The *vitae* of Helena and Ursula are compiled in the *Legenda aurea*, which suggests their universal popularity.²⁷ Except for these Romano-British saints, all female saints from the sixth century onwards are nuns and abbesses in the *SELS*. Along with the example of an early medieval holy nun, Scholastica, a sister of Benedict and a founder-abbess of a nunnery at Piumarola, Italy, it is clear that the *SELS*, or more precisely some of their manuscripts, have a distinct collection of Middle English *vitae* of monastic women in medieval England.

Although Bridget apparently has more in common with those Anglo-Saxon and British female saints, having been a nun and abbess from the British Isles, I also exclude her from my discussion mainly because of her universality. The cult of Bridget was widely promoted in the continent and was not confined to Ireland or the British Isles. The fact that the nineteen manuscripts of the *SELS* contain her *vita* also suggests that she should be seen as a universal saint in the *SELS* rather than a local saint like the other monastic female saints.

The other five female saints, namely Frideswide, Æthelthryth, Mildred, Edburga, and Winifred, were initially celebrated in local areas of England and Wales, and even though their fame grew in the later Middle Ages, they remained regional saints of England.²⁸ The focus on studies of native saints in the *SELS*, especially in the context

²⁶ On the *SEL* *vita* of Ursula, see D'Evelyn and Mills, eds, *The 'SEL'*, pp. 443-48; Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 86-92.

²⁷ See 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross' for Helena in Ryan, trans., *The Golden Legend*, II, pp. 168-73, and 'The Eleven Thousand Virgins' for Ursula in Ryan, trans., *The Golden Legend*, II, pp. 256-60.

²⁸ There is evidence of the veneration of Frideswide and Æthelthryth outside England – the cult site of Frideswide in Bomy, France, and a church dedicated to Æthelthryth in Niederöfflingen, Germany –, although they are not enough to claim their universality. On the cult of Frideswide in

of their contribution to a national identity, has been limited to such major English saints as Dunstan, Kenelm, Wulfstan, and Thomas Becket, who frequently appear in major manuscripts or in D'Evelyn and Mill's EETS edition, and therefore native female saints have not been investigated.²⁹ Yet all five female saints originated in various parts of England and Wales, having been celebrated in their local areas, and some of them even enjoyed nation-wide veneration.

Because of their locality, one might question their authenticity as saints, in other words, whether they were officially canonised and authorised by popes. None of these Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the *SELS* were canonised in an official manner. In fact, there are several English saints, such as Thomas Becket and Thomas of Cantilupe, who were canonised through the official process of the Holy See, but those examples are limited to male, bishop saints after the Conquest, with the sole exception of Margaret of Scotland in the eleventh century.³⁰ However, the fact that

Bomy, see Blair, 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', *Oxoniensia*, 52 (1987), 71-127 (pp. 119-127). On Æthelthryth's church in Niederöfflingen, see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 306.

²⁹ Renee Hamelinck, 'St. Kenelm and the Legends of the English Saints in the *South English Legendary*', in *Companion to Middle English Literature*, ed. by N. H. G. E. Veldhoen and H. Aertson (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), pp. 21-30; Jankofsky, 'National Characteristics in the Portrayal of English Saints in the *SEL*', in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 81-93; Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Jill Frederick, 'The *SEL*: Anglo-Saxon Saints and National Identity' in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 57-73.

³⁰ Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Late Medieval England', in *A Companion to 'The Book of Margery Kempe'*, ed. by John H. Arnold and Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 195-215 (p. 206).

On the canonisation of Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford, see Sari Katajala-Peltoma, *Gender, Miracles, and Daily Life: The Evidence of Fourteenth-Century Canonization Process* (Turnhout:

the insular nuns and abbesses were not canonised does not call into question their authenticity as saints. André Vauchez's history of canonisation in medieval Europe indicates that although there were episcopal controls in the creation of saints' cults through the translation of saints' relics, it was not until the twelfth century that saints were required to be authorised by papal canonisation.³¹ Therefore, all the five monastic women in the *SELS* whose fame as saints was already established by then were legitimate saints, continuously celebrated even afterwards. As for the holy monastic women, it is more likely that they were 'canonised' at local and popular levels by cult activities rather than by 'official' canonisation. Even though they were not authorised by the pope, the cult activities that surrounded them, including the documentation of their *vitae* in hagiographic collections such as the *SELS*, made them 'canonised' as saints.

2. The *SEL* Manuscripts of Monastic Women's Lives

Although the earliest surviving manuscript does not include any native women saints, the legends of Anglo-Saxon and British female saints were later added to a particular group of the manuscripts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Concerning the *Gilte Legende*, which contains more native saints in its supplementary manuscripts than the original manuscripts, and some of whose *vitae* draw on the *SELS* as their sources, Richard Hamer and Vida Russell state that supplementary collections often include new additions of saints' lives which were of interest to the institution,

Brepols, 2012).

³¹ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 19-20; pp. 22-25.

locality, or nation of the new compilers.³² The same holds true for a particular group of later manuscripts of the *SELS*. While Frideswide is the most popular native female saint whose *vitae*, both shorter and longer versions, are extant in seven manuscripts across several groups of manuscripts, another four native women appear in the same group of manuscripts in the later period of circulation. The three Anglo-Saxon female saints, Æthelthryth, Mildred, and Edburga, are commonly grouped together, appearing in three manuscripts: E (London, British Library, Egerton MS 1993), V (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. A. 1, known as the Vernon Manuscript), and B (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 779). These manuscripts, along with MS R (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS 605 (R.3.25)), are called the ‘E’ branch of the manuscript stemma, with MS E as the oldest manuscript in this group.³³ This branch is distinctive in containing a group of *vitae* of native saints, including Anglo-Saxon and British female saints. According to Görlach, a group of ‘additional’ English saints, which appear in this branch are: Æthelthryth, Birinus, Botulf, Edburga, Egwine, and Mildred.³⁴ Of these three manuscripts of the E branch, Winifred appears only in MS B in a group of saints unique to this manuscript.³⁵

³² Hamer and Russell, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the ‘Gilde Legende’*, p. xiv.

³³ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘South English Legendary’*, p. 17. On the ‘E’ branch of the *SELS*, see also Blanton, ‘Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers’, pp. 233-50.

³⁴ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘South English Legendary’*, p. 17.

To this list of native saints, Blanton adds more saints, including Edward the Confessor, Guthlac, Fremund, Æthelberht, and Oswin, and Winifred as native saints who appear in part of manuscripts of this branch as well as other manuscripts or are from a group of unique saints in MS B. See Blanton, ‘Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers’, p. 235.

³⁵ The *vitae* of unique saints in MS B are edited in Horstmann, ‘Des Ms. Bodl. 779 jüngere Zusatzlegenden zur südlichen Legendensammlung’, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 82 (1889), 307-422, 351-53.

The importance of examining a manuscript of the *SELS* in each different collection should certainly be noted. The work had long been called the ‘*South English Legendary*’ (*SEL*) by scholars, but there has been a critical trend towards discussing this hagiographic collection as the *South English Legendaries* in plural form rather than as a single *SEL*.³⁶ The critical shift from the single *SEL* to the *SELS* reflects the nature of medieval works. The *SELS* most emphatically present characteristics of what Paul Zumthor calls *mouvance*, textual variations and fluidity, produced in the course of textual transmissions.³⁷ In 2001, Litzka pointed out the different characteristics of each manuscript of the *SELS* in terms of its contents, arrangement, and intended audience and put forward his view of the *SELS* in a plural form. Robert Mills also argues that the modern title, the *South English Legendary*, is misleading because each *SEL* collection has ‘a diffuse and open text, relentlessly modified and adapted to suit the locations in which it was copied and the historical circumstances in which it was disseminated’.³⁸ These discussions came to fruition in the recent publication of *Rethinking the ‘SELS’*. For their ‘variety and flexibility’ of ‘contents, time and audience of these manuscripts’, this hagiographic work should not be treated as a single literary work.³⁹ Bell and Nelson Couch’s collection of essays, which was

³⁶ Litzka’s essay, ‘The *South English Legendaries*’, in *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages: Studies in the Cultural History of North-Western Europe*, ed. by Litzka and Lorna E. M. Walker (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 243-80, is reprinted in *Rethinking the ‘SELS’*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 23-65.

³⁷ Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. by Philip Bennett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 41-49; Bella Millett, ‘*Mouvance* and the Medieval Author: Re-Editing *Ancrene Wisse*’, in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 9-20.

³⁸ Mills, ‘Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief’, in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Salih (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 87-103 (p. 87).

³⁹ Blurton and Wogan-Browne, ‘Rethinking the *South English Legendaries*’, in *Rethinking*

published a few months before Blurton and Wogan-Browne's book, takes a similar approach, as it is thoroughly focused on one of the *SEL* manuscripts, L (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud. Misc. 108).

Just as Zuthmor's concept of *mouvance* raised a question about creating critical editions of medieval works, focusing on a particular manuscript of the *SELS* for its text and context also reveals the limits of critical editions of the *SELS*.⁴⁰ Of the two critical editions published by the Early English Text Society (EETS), Horstmann's edition in 1887 is based on the earliest surviving manuscript, L. Horstmann apparently noticed that his edition, based on MS L, was not sufficient for scrutinising the work, since he seemed, as Liskza notes, intent on editing all the *SEL* manuscripts that he knew as a series.⁴¹ While Horstmann's edition is based on a single manuscript, focusing on the context of manuscript, D'Evelyn and Mill's EETS edition in 1956 employs select manuscripts, MSS C (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 145) and H (London, British Library, Harley MS 2277), emended and supplemented by MSS A (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 43), and J (London British Library, Cotton MS Julius D.ix). Although D'Evelyn and Mill's edition is often used as a critical edition of the *SELS*, it is by no means the definitive critical edition because of their choice of manuscripts.⁴² From this edition, which is based on a few select manuscripts, it is almost impossible to gain an overview of the saints included in the

the 'South English Legendaries', ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 3-19 (p. 10).

⁴⁰ Millett, 'Mouvance and the Medieval Author: Re-Editing *Ancrene Wisse*', pp. 12-13

⁴¹ Liskza, 'The *South English Legendaries*', in *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, p. 26.

⁴² See, for example, George Kane in *The Review of English Studies*, 11.43 (1960), pp. 311-12.

SELS. Moreover, because the manuscripts used as base texts in this edition are collections of universal saints and some major male English saints, the presence of native female saints will most possibly be overlooked, unless we examine other collections of the *SEL* saints' lives at the manuscript level. It is possible to criticise the existing editions, especially D'Evelyn and Mills's EETS edition, which looks like a critical edition of the *SELS*, but it should be noted that the *SELS* themselves set limits and render it in some way impossible to make a single, definitive critical edition, because of their plurality. The diversity of the manuscripts also makes it difficult to consider the *SEL* in the hierarchal structure of the stemma codicum. Each manuscript deserves equal attention, and no manuscript, therefore, including later manuscripts with additional native saints, should be dismissed as 'contaminated'. Since the *vitae* of five native female saints are not included in either Horstmann's or D'Evelyn and Mill's editions, they have been edited and published individually, each with a different base text: the E branch saints, Æthelthryth, Mildred, and Edburga, are edited from MS E; Frideswide from MSS A and R; and Winifred from MS B. Except for that of Winifred, their base manuscripts have been chosen from the aspect of the preservation of better texts. Although I use these edited texts for my discussion, I would also suggest that it is essential for study of the *SELS* to look at the context of each manuscript, as well as its texts. Focusing on a certain manuscript, rather than pursuing the goal of a 'better' text, also reveals an idea of collecting saints which the hagiographer or compiler would have had.

In this thesis, MS B is a significant corpus of native female saints' lives. Compiled in the fifteenth century, it contains 135 items of both *sanctorale* and *temporale* texts. Linguistic and dialectic features show its place of origin as North Hampshire, but its provenance was not fully known until the early seventeenth century, when William

Harwood, prebendary of Winchester, donated this manuscript to the Bodleian Library.⁴³ As well as *temporale* materials such as the most complete and original form of the ‘Defence of Women’, MS B is characteristic for its collection of *sanctorale* texts.⁴⁴ It is the only manuscript which contains all the native female saints, not only the three from a group of ‘additional’ English saints but also Frideswide and Winifred. Although MS E is often regarded as the best base manuscript for the *vitae* of native saints in the E branch, on account of its older and more complete texts, MS B provides us with an important context for examining native female saints. MS B is idiosyncratic in terms of its *compilatio* and *ordinatio* of saints.⁴⁵ Because of its inclusion of unique saints, such as English saints and holy popes, which cannot be seen in other *SEL* manuscripts, MS B is sometimes seen as a ‘collector’s copy’ which is ‘compiled from various sources, some at least fragmentary’.⁴⁶ Also, in terms of its order, while in a conventional hagiographical structure, saints are arranged according to their feast days in calendar order, MS B is, as Litzka notes, an ‘extreme example’ of the ‘largely disorderly’ *SEL* manuscripts, which locates saints by the compiler’s peculiar sense of

⁴³ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁴ Pickering, ‘The “Defence of Women”’, pp. 160-61.

⁴⁵ On the concept of *compilatio* and *ordinatio* in medieval manuscripts, see M. B. Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. 35-69. See also Elisabeth Dutton, *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008); Cynthia Turner Camp, *Anglo-Saxon Saints’ Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 91-101.

⁴⁶ Gorlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, p. 76.

On the collection of holy popes, see Wogan-Browne, ‘Bodies of Belief: MS Bodley 779’s *South English Legendary*’, in *Rethinking the ‘SELS’*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 403-23.

order, often interrupted and disrupted by another groups of saints.⁴⁷ In some ways, saints are apparently grouped according to specific categories. Three Anglo-Saxon female saints are put together: Æthelthryth, Frideswide, and Edburga, in folios 279v-283v; and, after several *vitae*, Mildred appears in folios 302r-303v. The manuscript clearly shows the compiler's particular interest in Anglo-Saxon female saints through his attempt to locate them together.

Along with the three manuscripts in the E branch, although it is seen as a fragment consisting of incomplete *vitae*, MS Wa (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS 5043) is one of the collections which characteristically contains Anglo-Saxon and British saints. The latter half of the manuscript, consisting of two parchment bifolia, contains *vitae* of eight saints. Six of them (Brendan, Patrick, Birinus, Mildred, and Frideswide) are closely connected with British and Anglo-Saxon localities.⁴⁸ There is another fragment, MS Ua (Cambridge, University Library, Additional 2585 [3]), originally bound together with MS Wa, which contains the *vita* of Oswald the King and fragmentary *vitae* of another two saints.⁴⁹ Given its manuscript context, in which Mildred coexists with Frideswide (in the shorter version), even though both *vitae* are incomplete MS Wa is also one of the important collections of Anglo-Saxon female saints.

⁴⁷ Liszka, 'The South English Legendaries', in *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 23-65 (pp. 38-39).

⁴⁸ Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 116.

⁴⁹ Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, pp. 115-16. Although it is codicologically unrelated to the *SEL*, the first six folios are a fragment of *Les Enfances Vivien*, one of the *chansons de geste* dealing with William of Orange. See Joseph J. Dugga, ed., *A Fragment of 'Les Enfances Vivien': National Library of Wales MS. 5043E*, *Modern Philology*, 116 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 3. See also National Library of Wales, *Handlist of Manuscripts in the National Library of Wales*, 4 vols (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1940-82), II, p. 14.

3. Narratives of Medieval Monastic Women

While classical martyrs represent a major part of the hagiographic collections, especially in terms of female saints, holy confessors were also celebrated and compiled in medieval hagiography. Given that the term ‘martyr’ etymologically means ‘witness’ in Latin (*OED*), all the saints who are witnesses for the faith of Christ can therefore be called martyrs, no matter how they died. Yet confessors – in a narrower sense, non-martyrs, who completed their lives as bishops, abbots, nuns, and abbesses, or as pious kings and queens – grew in importance in the Middle Ages, showing a different form of piety from classical martyrs, who were violently killed for their faith. This is particularly true of female saints in medieval England. While there were male martyrs in medieval England, such as the politically murdered and martyred saints, Oswald, Edward the Martyr, Kenelm, and Thomas Becket, all the monastic women in the *SELS* are confessors who finished their lives as nuns or abbesses in their nunneries, except for the special case of Winifred, a medieval virgin martyr who is later resurrected.⁵⁰ As was noted earlier, medieval holy women from the sixth century onwards included in the *SELS* are almost exclusively nuns and abbesses in the British Isles.⁵¹ Although

⁵⁰ On the cult of royal martyred saints, especially in the Anglo-Saxon period, see D. W. Rollason, ‘The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11 (1982), pp. 1-22; Paul A. Hayward, ‘The Idea of Innocent Martyrdom in Late Tenth- and Eleventh-Century English Hagiology’, in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical Society*, ed. by Diana Wood, *Studies in Christian History*, 30 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 81-92; Cubitt, ‘Sites and Sanctity: Revisiting the Cult of Murdered and Martyred Anglo-Saxon Royal Saints’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 9.1 (2000), 53-83.

⁵¹ For the *SEL* vita of Scholastica, see ‘The Life of St. Scholastica’, in *Saints’ Lives in Middle English Collections*, ed. by E. Gordon Whatley, Anne B. Thommpson, and Robert K. Upchurch (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), pp. 199-212; See also Katherine G.

it is not always helpful to assign saints to specific classifications because there are exceptions, the medieval holy women in the *SELS* share a common trope of cloistered women whereas the narratives of the classical saints can be categorised into virgin martyrs, widows, and penitent sinners.⁵² Minnie E. Wells points out that in one of the *SELS* manuscripts, X (Oxford, Corpus Christi, MS 431), the hagiographer/compiler attempts to distinguish *vitae* of monastic women, such as Bridget and Scholastica, from those of virgin martyrs, by describing these saints under the headings of their *vitae* as ‘virgine et non martire’.⁵³ As this suggests, the *SEL vitae* of medieval monastic women present a new form of female sanctity, different from that of popular classical virgin martyrs.

The *vitae* of monastic women, however, do not present a completely separate narrative from those of classical virgin martyrs. In many ways, their narratives are based on those of their classical predecessors by drawing upon various hagiographic topoi. Above all, all the medieval monastic women in the *SELS* are virgins, and the

McMahon, ‘St Scholastica – Not a Wife!’, in *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment*, ed. by Jankofsky, pp. 18-28.

Although she is not included in the *SELS*, Juthwara, a sixth-century woman in Dorset, is an exceptional example of a virgin martyr in medieval Britain, who was killed by her brother for her chastity. See Hostmann, ed., *‘Nova Legenda Anglie’: As Collected by John of Tynemouth, John Capgrave, and Others, and First Printed, with New Lives, by Wynkyn de Worde a.d. m d xui*, 2 vols (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1901), II, pp. 98-100; Blanton, ‘The Lost and (Not) Found Sources for Female Saints’ Legends in John of Tynemouth’s *Sactilogium*’, in *A Companion to British Literature: Volume I Medieval Literature 700-1450*, ed. by Robert Demaria, Jr., Heesok Chang, and Samantha Zacher (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 65-80 (pp. 65-71).

⁵² On problems of simplistic classifications of saints and their narratives, see Riches, ‘St George as a Male Virgin Martyr’, in *Gender and Holiness*, ed. by Riches and Salih, pp. 65-85 (pp. 65-66). On the tentative categorisation of classical female saints, see Larissa Tracy’s classification of female saints in the *Gilte Legende* in *Women of the ‘Gilte Legende’: A Selection of Middle English Saints Lives* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), p. 3.

⁵³ Minnie E. Wells, ‘The Structural Development of the *SEL*’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 41.3 (1942), 320-44 (p. 323).

ways in which their virginity is constructed are similar to those of virgin martyrs, undergoing continuous sexual threats. In the typical *vitae* of classical virgin martyrs, or more appropriately the *passiones* telling of their martyrdom, male pagan authorities attempt to force young maidens to abandon their Christian faith, threatening their devotion to virginity and chastity, but the saintly women endure a number of tortures and are martyred for their faith. These virgin martyrs are depicted not only as ideal models of Christian womanhood, but also as young girls who resist patriarchal society represented by their male opponents. In the *SELS*, as is often the case with medieval hagiographic collections, the virgin martyrs constitute the largest group of female saints, including Agatha, Agnes, Cecilia, Christina, Faith, Juliana, Justina, Katherine, Lucy, Margaret, and Ursula. According to Winstead, these virgin martyrs in the *SELS* are typically defiant virgin saints who do not succumb to brutal tortures, but rather hurl abuse at their tormentors and arouse their anger.⁵⁴ The power relationship in the virgin martyr legends usually centres on the religious conflict between Christian women and pagan male authorities. The legends of medieval holy nuns and abbesses retained the opposition between the sexes from classical narrative, but this structure is developed in a more domestic context featuring marriage within a Christian society. Even though they are no longer exposed to deadly persecutions, in the medieval narratives, native female saints are threatened, sometimes sexually, by male authorities because of their rejection of secular marriage, just as the classical virgin martyrs are.

As is often the case with narratives of classical virgin martyrs, marriage is certainly one of the central themes in the narratives of medieval monastic women. Barbara

⁵⁴ Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 71-78.

Yorke names this trope the ‘virgin valiantly resisting marriage’ motif in narratives of royal nuns, which was inherited from virgin saints of late antiquity.⁵⁵ Because they refuse the marriage proposals, sometimes made in a very similar way to attempted rape, medieval monastic women are threatened, sexually in many cases, by their persecutors, and tortured by them, sometimes in collusion with other women. Mildred is brutally tortured in a manner very reminiscent of classical martyrs because she rejects her suitor. The *vita* of Frideswide is mostly concerned with depicting how the saint flees from her suitor king. In these ways, when conflicts over marriage structurally connect a secular man and a saintly woman, the narrative often produces patterns similar to the *passiones* of virgin martyrs, even though they are set in the medieval British Isles.

On the other hand, given that those holy monastic women are not martyred in the end, the hagiographers of medieval holy nuns and abbesses need to show their sainthood equivalent to martyrdom by alternate means. Among various testaments of their piety, the performance of miracles most importantly offers significant proof of their sanctity. Holy nuns in the *SELS* perform a variety of miracles: healing the sick, transforming objects, and defending themselves from dangers. The *vitae* of Bridget, both in shorter and longer versions, contain a number of miracles, most probably reflecting their Celtic and folkloric influences. In the *vitae* of Bridget, which begin with a pre-natal episode of a mysterious encounter with a magician, the saint produces cheese and butter out of nothing, dries wet clothes quickly, loses her eye in order to avoid marriage, transforms water into ale and stone to salt, and heals the blind and

⁵⁵ Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 153-54.

dumb.⁵⁶ In the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon women, both Frideswide and Edburga heal the blind and the sick including lepers; Frideswide makes a spring appear in front of her nuns; Frideswide and Mildred are miraculously saved from their enemies; Frideswide and Edburga even punish those who attempt to harm them. The *SEL* *vita* of Æthelthryth is the only narrative telling of a posthumous miracle, the discovery of her uncorrupted body. These episodes of miracles play a crucial role in legitimising those holy confessors who become saints without being martyred.

While these episodes of continuous trials and miracles suggest the saints' somewhat superhuman, saintly abilities, the quotidian activities depicted as taking place in their cloistered lives importantly offer models to be followed by the audience. The hagiographers often insert brief descriptions which give a glimpse of holy women's lives within the cloisters. The passage from the *vita* of Æthelthryth most emphatically shows a holy nun's spiritual life:

Clannore lif ne mite beo þan se[int] Aeldri gan lede
 Of fasting & of orisons & of almes dede.
 Of ech godnesse & holinesse hire siwede inow
 Ate laste as God it wolde toward hire ende heo drow (ll. 27-30).⁵⁷

Æthelthryth's life, consisting of fasting, praying, and alms-giving, is presented as an ideal for cloistered women to imitate. Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell argue that the theme of the saint's supernatural power (such as performance of miracles,

⁵⁶ For the shorter version of the *vita* of Bridget, which includes miracles only, see Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 192-93; for the longer *vita*, see D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 37-46.

⁵⁷ All quotations from the *SEL* *vita* of Æthelthryth are, unless otherwise noted, taken from Tristan Major, 'Saint Etheldreda in the *SEL*', *Anglia: Journal of English Philology*, 128.1 (2010), 83-101 (pp. 98-101).

visions, and mystical experience), asceticism (including private prayer), and acts of charity for the sick and the poor, are dominant in the *vitae* of female saints, although they do not call these motifs ‘feminine’ but ‘androgynous’ because these are similarly observed in the *vitae* of some male saints.⁵⁸ These virtues, summarised concisely in the cloistered life of Æthelthryth, are commonly found in the other *vitae* of monastic women in the *SELS*.

Just as fasting is listed in first place in Æthelthryth’s ideal monastic life, holy monastic women in the *SELS* voluntarily engage with the mortification of the flesh. According to Wogan-Browne, asceticism in strict enclosure often serves as an alternative to martyrdom for medieval female confessor saints.⁵⁹ The observing of ascetic practices was one of the important ways for female practitioners to follow the examples of virgin martyrs’ *passiones* and eventually identify themselves with the crucified Christ, according to the ideal of *imitatio Christi*. Frideswide, too, willingly imposes a strict asceticism on herself even before she takes the veil, wearing haircloth on her skin, eating only a small amount of vegetables, and drinking cold water. As her *vitae* later tell, such asceticism serves to defend the saint from temptation.

Æthelthryth’s alms-giving is also an important act, as it is particularly for royal female saints who possess wealth. As is the case with Elizabeth of Hungary, it enables them not only to show their virtue of charity, but to embody virtues of humility and poverty, even though they are of noble birth.

Praying (‘oraisons’) play major part in their lives. It is also seen as one of the ascetic practices. As is shown in the example of Edburga, observing a nightly vigil is

⁵⁸ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 228-37.

⁵⁹ Wogan-Browne, ‘Queens, Virgins and Mothers’, p. 18; *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, pp. 123-50.

also one of the ascetic practices in monastic lives. Moreover, the importance of a life of prayer is shown in their reading activities, as reading is often associated with praying.⁶⁰ The *SEL vitae* of monastic women characteristically depict their bookish activities. The *vitae* of holy nuns in the *SELS* describe that they are educated and become acquainted with holy writings such as the psalms and gospels at a very early age: Edburga, who is given a gospel book at her request, learns how to read books from her abbess at a nunnery in Winchester, while Frideswide receives education in reading and writing at home, like an aristocratic woman, from a female teacher called Ailgive. After their early spiritual education, these gifted children perform miracles through their experiences of reading: the young Frideswide's mastery of the psalms is retold as part of her miracles; Mildred is depicted as most familiar with reading and singing the psalms. These episodes does not only suggest that female piety is often shown through their affection for spiritual reading, but the hagiographers' frequent references to reading play an important role in building up an intimate relationship between the saints and their readers through their shared experience of reading.

The ideal life embodied in the *vitae* of monastic women was not, of course, only intended for nuns and abbesses in late medieval England. They were certainly an important part of the audience of the *SELS*, but there is as yet no consensus about the primary intended audience of the *SELS*. They would have been less-educated religious (including nuns, or intended religious), or, more specifically, nuns, and lay people, such as regional gentry.⁶¹ Given that they are written in Middle English and also in

⁶⁰ Wogan-Browne, "“Reading is Good Prayer”: Recent Research on Female Reading Communities", in *New Medieval Literatures*, 5, ed. by Rita Copeland, David Lawton, and Wendy Scase (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 229-97.

⁶¹ Pickering, *The South Ministry and Passion Edited from St. John's College, MS B. 6* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1984); Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 47; Katherine G.

verse style, the *SEL* narratives would mostly have been read by lay people or female religious rather than by an educated, clerical audience. At any rate, because of the quantity and diversity of the manuscripts, it is necessary to look at the audience of each manuscript individually. Few of the manuscripts clearly indicate female ownership. In 1450, Margery Carew bequeathed a *SEL* manuscript, I (Cambridge, St John's College, MS 28), which is a collection of the *temporale* texts and associated saints' *vitae*. MS G (London, Lambeth Palace, MS 223), which contains a unique text of Helena, is known to have been owned by the Higgins family in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶² It was also used by female members of the family, 'Anne' and 'Mary', as their signatures on the manuscript suggest (fol. 77r). MS V, which includes the legends of Æthelthryth, Mildred, and Edburga, is also known as a collection of writings for nuns and anchoresses, including *Ancrene Wisse* and a Middle English translation of *De institutione inclusarum* by Aelred of Rievaulx.⁶³ Although it would have been read and used by various readers in the Middle Ages, female religious such as nuns are believed to have been one possible audience of the manuscript. Regarding the inclusion of the *vitae* of English nuns in MS V, the *SEL*

McMahon, 'St. Scholastica – Not a Wife!', in *The SEL: A Critical Assessment*, pp. 18-28; Robert Easting, 'The SEL "St Patrick" as Translation', *Leeds Studies in English*, NS, 21 (1990), pp. 119-40; Annie Samson, 'The *SEL*: Constructing a Context', in *Thirteenth Century England 1: Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference, 1985*, ed. by P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986), pp. 185-95.

⁶² M. Deanesly, 'Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', *Modern Language Review*, 15.4 (1920), 349-58 (p. 357). On MS I, see Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, pp. 85-86.

⁶³ For example, see Carol M. Meale, 'The Miracles of Our Lady: Context and Interpretation', in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), pp. 117-36 (p. 135); N. F. Blake, 'Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organisation', in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by Pearsall, pp. 45-59 (p. 58).

vitae of monastic women are often argued to have been intended for nuns.⁶⁴ Even though it is difficult to determine the actual female ownership and readership from manuscript evidence, the *SEL* narrators characteristically feminise their audiences. Their references to ‘wiues’ (*Æthelthryth*, l. 15) and ‘a knyghtes doughter’ (*Frideswide*, shorter *vita*, l. 12) suggest that the *vitae* of monastic women appeal not only nuns but also laywomen of various social and marital status.⁶⁵ Whether the primary intended audience was nuns or not, the *SELS* are supposed to have been owned, read, and used by various groups of audience during the transmission of the manuscripts. The portraits of holy monastic women would have certainly been of benefit to medieval nuns who read them, but, more importantly, their legends would also have provided imitable models for other readers outside monastic communities.

This thesis focuses on the aforementioned five monastic women from the medieval British Isles, found in the *SELS* – *Frideswide*, *Æthelthryth*, *Mildred*, *Edburga*, and *Winifred* – by looking at the ways in which they are represented, and comparing these representations with those of other saints, such as classical female saints and male universal and local saints, in the *SEL vitae* and other texts. Although the main corpus of examination is the *vitae* appearing mainly in the fourteenth and fifteenth century manuscripts of the *SELS*, Latin original versions and the contemporary vernacular *vitae*, mainly in Middle English, are also referred to as supplementary texts for comparison where necessary. The *SEL* narrators sometimes make vague references to

⁶⁴ See Paul Acker, ‘St Mildred in the South English Legendary’, in *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment*, ed. by Jankofsky, pp. 140-53 (p. 141); Blanton, ‘Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers’, pp. 240-42.

⁶⁵ On the *vitae* of *Frideswide*, both in the longer and shorter versions, see Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publication, 2003), pp. 23-50.

their sources as ‘þe bok telleþ me’ (for example, the *vita* of Winifred, l. 34).⁶⁶ It is highly likely that they use this phrase simply as a line filler, but at this stage, the production of the *SEL vitae* always involved the translation and transformation of existing sources. For the Latin sources, Görlach points out that *Nova Legenda Anglie*, the fourteenth-century collection of native saints from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, collected as *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae et Hiberniae*, by John of Tynemouth, and later rearranged in alphabetical order in the fifteenth century, is a common source of the *vitae* of Frideswide, Æthelthryth, and Mildred. Also, Anglo-Latin hagiographic collections such as those by Bede and Goscelin are also possible sources for writing their *vitae*.⁶⁷ The *SEL* hagiographers did not only translate these Latin sources into Middle English, but they also employed free adaptation in their writing, by versifying, summarising, and inserting original comments, in order to convert their saints’ narratives into typical *SEL*-style *vitae*.⁶⁸ For the Middle English versions, although the *vita* of Edburga cannot be found in any other Middle English versions except the *SEL vita*, the *vitae* of the other four saints are found in contemporary Middle English hagiography. Vernacular collections of native female saints outside the *SELS* are the Supplementary *Gilte Legende*, which includes Frideswide and Winifred, and Bokenham’s Abbotsford *Legenda aurea*, which contains Æthelthryth and Winifred. Both works are similar to the corpus of MS B in terms of their collection, although with not many native female saints. John Mirk’s

⁶⁶ On the *vita* of Winifred, see Horstmann, ‘Des Ms. Bodl. 779 jüngere Zusatzlegenden zur südlichen Legendensammlung’, pp. 331-33.

⁶⁷ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, p. 174, p. 175, p. 179, and p. 197.

⁶⁸ On the *SEL* narrators’ so-called ‘outspoken style’ in the *SEL vitae* and associated texts, see Oliver Pickering, ‘Outspoken Style in the *SEL* and Robert of Gloucester’, in *Rethinking the ‘SELS’*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 106-45.

Festial contains a sermon on Winifred.⁶⁹ The *vitae* of Æthelthryth are included in several unique manuscript collections of Middle English saints' legends. All these *vitae* offer important grounds for comparison. Since the *SEL vitae* of monastic women are short in length, comparison with contemporary *vitae* highlights characteristics of the *SEL vitae*, revealing what they omit and what they retain for emphasis.

Consisting of five chapters, this thesis explores each saint, chapter by chapter, with focus on topics distinctive to each *vita*. These five native female women in the *SELS* are highlighted in studies such as those by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Kerryn Olsen, and Virginia Blanton, as this group of saints shows a marked distinction from other saints' *vitae* in terms of their narratives, identity, and textual tradition.⁷⁰ In this study, my focus is on the construction of gender and locality in the *vitae* of those monastic women. Both gender and locality are key elements constructing the identity which they share. Their gender, especially as virgins, is part of their marked identity. Their lives are rooted in and associated with specific local areas of the medieval British Isles. Furthermore, both concepts of gender and locality are inseparably connected by the *SEL* texts' interest in depicting spaces. A number of medieval texts of many different genres engage in depicting various spaces, places, and landscapes. In the light of spatial theory, recent studies have explored how spaces were perceived and

⁶⁹ See Susan Powell, *John Mirk's 'Festial': Edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.II*, EETS, OS 334 and 335, 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009-2012).

⁷⁰ Wogan-Browne, 'Queens, Virgins and Mothers: Hagiographic Representations of the Abbess and her Powers in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Britain', in *Women and Sovereignty* (Yearbook of the Traditional Cosmology Society, 7), ed. by Louise Olga Fradenburg (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 14-35 (p. 15); Olsen, 'Questions of Identity: Rewriting Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in Post-Conquest England, c. 1066-c. 1500', unpublished Ph. D thesis, the University of Auckland, 2009, p. 162; 'Women and Englishness: Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in the *SEL*', *Limina*, 19 (2013), pp. 1-9; Blanton, 'Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers: Native Saints in the *SELS*', in *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, pp. 234-50 (p. 236).

practiced in the Middle Ages through analysis of these texts.⁷¹ The *SEL vitae* of monastic women also demonstrate how their spaces are constructed by their static and dynamic states. In a monastic context, practices of enclosure were observed by female religious as well, and perhaps considered more seriously in relation to their gender. The idea of enclosure is particularly important for women, since they were often associated with and supposed to be contained in enclosed spaces, such as households, nunneries, and anchorholds.⁷² It also becomes a central theme in writings about medieval religious women.⁷³ The images of a gendered space of enclosure are also recurrent in the *SEL vitae* of monastic women. Although the virginity of medieval monastic women is shaped in similar ways to that of classical virgin martyrs through external threat and internal performance, their virginity as an impermeable space is also represented through images of enclosure in the physical, monastic, and geographic senses. The enclosed space extends from the nunneries and shrines, where they live, to a larger sphere of each town and even the nation of England. While the theory and practice of enclosure form a particular space in their lives, it is also true that monastic women of the *SELS* do not always remain in the enclosed spaces. Instead,

⁷¹ On the ideas of space, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); in the medieval context, see Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka, eds, *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Laura L. Howes, ed., *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007); Julian Weiss and Salih, eds, *Locating the Middle Ages: The Spaces and Places of Medieval Culture* ([London]: King's College London, Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2012).

⁷² On the division of space by gender, see Hanawalt and Kobialka, *Medieval Practices of Space*, p. x; Michael Camille, 'Signs of the City: Place, Power, and Public Fantasy in Medieval Paris', in *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. by Hanawalt and Kobialka, pp. 1-36 (p. 27).

⁷³ For the notion of enclosure, especially in relation to female anchoritism, see Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edward, eds, *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005).

the *vitae* often depict their departure from their enclosure. The legends of native saints map various localities surrounding the saints. Even though they are nuns and abbesses, who are not often associated with spatial movements, the *SEL* hagiographers depict the journey of these monastic women who travel for various purposes – for their spiritual pursuit, flight from their enemies, or even their posthumous translation. Through their travel, the *vitae* do not only map the geography of medieval England, but they also present further stronger views of enclosure through their return home. Considering the importance of spaces and places depicted in the *vitae*, I examine various hagiographic topoi in each chapter. Along with the motifs and patterns of which hagiographic narratives consist, the spaces and places, as the word ‘topos’ originally means, are important to consider in the construction of gender and locality of the Anglo-Saxon and British female saints.

The thesis begins with the *vitae* of Frideswide, the most popular and perhaps the earliest texts of all the five monastic women in the *SELS*. Focusing on the various representations of enclosed spaces, such as the saint’s virgin body, her nunnery, and the walled city of Oxford which she patronises, I explore the topoi of virginity and the virgin body, in different landscapes, employed in the *SEL vitae*. Chapter 1 is followed by the group of three Anglo-Saxon female saints in the ‘E’ branch manuscripts: Æthelthryth, Mildred, and Edburga. Chapter 2, on Æthelthryth, deals with issues of canonisation and saint making activities. By comparing the *SEL vita* with the two contemporary Middle English *vitae* of Æthelthryth, I discuss the *SELS*’s unique ways of making her a saint. Chapter 3 explores various relationships between women within cloisters, depicted in the *vita* of Mildred. The *vita* characteristically presents the two contrasting images of good and bad female relationships, allocated in two nations, England and France. While the *vita* of Mildred is set in a feminised sphere, that of

Edburga shapes the saint's authority within male secular and ecclesiastical communities. In Chapter 4, although Edburga is the only saint whose abbacy is uncertain, I explore the formation of her quasi-priestly authority in the context of male communities in Winchester. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses an originally Welsh, but later celebrated as an English saint, Winifred. With a focus on the theme of rape, depicted in the *SEL vita*, I apply an idea of metaphorical rape to an episode of her posthumous translation from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury and explore possibilities of translation of body and texts as acts of rape/*raptus*. All these *vitae* bring light to unique narratives of holy women, as well as new forms of female sanctity and piety, in late medieval England, different from those of universal female saints.

Chapter 1

Saint Frideswide of Oxford and Topoi of Virginity

1. Introduction

Saint Frideswide was an early eighth-century nun and abbess in Oxford. The *SEL vitae* of Frideswide, which exist in longer and shorter versions, feature a life of a medieval monastic woman in England, drawing upon various hagiographic topoi that are found in the legends of classical martyrs, both male and female, as well as hermits, and earlier male monastics. As discussed in the Introduction, since all insular female saints in the *SELS* are virgins, their *vitae* are first and foremost influenced by those of classical virgin martyrs. In her discussion of the longer *vita* of Frideswide as one example of a non-martyr female saint, Anne B. Thompson examines how the *vita* escapes the classical virgin martyr plot. Thompson argues that the *SEL vita* of Frideswide lacks the drama which is seen in the virgin martyr legends through the virgin's heroic and powerful representations; instead, it is concerned with women's ordinary experiences.¹ Thompson demonstrates how the *vita* builds up a close relationship with the audience's everyday life through the saint's 'ordinariness', and how it provides them with various examples and lessons to follow. Although virgin martyr legends were not, of course, the only source for making hagiography of medieval women more dramatic, the *vita* of Frideswide does not feature some of their more dramatic moments, such as the *passiones* in which virgin martyrs fiercely battle with pagan male authorities. And even in comparison

¹ Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the 'SEL'*, pp. 139-53.

with classical non-martyrs, including Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt, Martha, and Elene in the *SELS*, the *vita* of Frideswide focuses more on the ordinary life of a woman, more specifically, those living in the pursuit of spirituality. However, if we compare the *vitae* of Frideswide with those of holy nuns in the medieval British Isles, the *vitae* of Frideswide do not stand out as the best examples of *vitae* that focus on a saint's ordinary life. For example, the *vita* of Edburga, which shows the least influence from the virgin martyr legends among the other insular female saints in the *SELS*, seems to display a greater interest in aspects of the ordinary life of medieval female monastics than Frideswide's. On the other hand, the *vitae* of Frideswide have a rather complex narrative structure which makes them more eventful than any other *vitae*. Thompson's argument is still valid, however, given that the *vita* of Frideswide seems consciously to follow and also depart from the narrative patterns of virgin martyr legends. In the process of departure, the narrative of Frideswide employs various hagiographic motifs from the *vitae* of various saints, conflating and sometimes reversing them to make her *vita* more than ordinary.

This chapter examines various hagiographic topoi found in the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide. As noted in Introduction, by 'topoi', I mean not only the narrative patterns and motifs commonly observed in saints' legends, but also, as in an etymological sense, the places in which the *vitae* of Frideswide are staged. She is situated in two different places: a city and a wood. Her urban narrative in the city of Oxford is more closely based on the *vitae* of classical, sometimes male, virgin martyrs, along with various images of enclosure. The topos of seemingly impermeable yet actually vulnerable virginity is particularly important, as it is imaged at various levels to be represented by Frideswide's body, her nunnery, and the walled city of Oxford. The latter part of her *vitae* features Frideswide's life in a

non-enclosed space outside her city in a wood, and is told in ways highly reminiscent of hermits and earlier monastics, in a liminal space. Focusing on this construction of her *vitae*, this chapter explores the narrative consisting of various hagiographic tropes in urban and non-urban contexts, with particular reference to the relationship between a saint and various landscapes. The *vitae* of Frideswide provide a starting point for discussing the *vitae* of medieval monastic women more generally, in terms of the extent to which they follow or depart from the classical models of female virgin saints by drawing on various other hagiographic topoi in order to produce their own narratives of medieval holy women.

From the viewpoint of textual tradition, Frideswide is the most popular female saint of all Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the *SELS*. Frideswide appears more frequently than any other insular woman, and in the two different versions noted above. The *vitae* of Frideswide are included in the seven manuscripts: A (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 43), B, J, P (Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2344), R, S (London, British Library, Stowe MS 949), and Wa.² Also, her name appears in the ‘Index’ or *Table of Contents* in MS V.³ Considering that the contents of the Vernon *SEL* are arranged basically in calendar order of the saints’ feast days, the *vita* of Frideswide (19 October) would have been included in the missing folios (ff. 57-64) between the *vitae* of Leger (2 October), which ends imperfectly, and of Clement (23 November), whose beginning is missing.

The shorter version consists of 117 lines, and appears in MSS R and S, as well as

² Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, p.196.

³ On the ‘Index’ or Table of Contents in the Vernon Manuscript, see Mary S. Serjeantson, ‘The Index of the Vernon Manuscript’, *Modern Language Review*, 32 (1937), pp. 222-61; Wendy Scase, ‘Rubrics, Opening Numbering, and the Vernon *Table of Contents*’, in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), pp. 97-124.

in a fragment, MS Wa. The longer version, consisting of 188 lines, is found in manuscripts A, B, J, and P.⁴ According to Sherry L. Reames, who edited both versions of Frideswide, these shorter and longer *vitae* are based on two extant Latin versions: Latin A, produced between 1100-1300, for the shorter version, and Latin B, by Robert Cricklade in 1140-70, for the longer version. Reames summarises characteristics of each version by stating that the shorter version is more monastic, with emphasis on literacy, asceticism, virginity, and celestial marriage to God; while the longer version is intended for a lay audience to provide instruction in morality and conduct, with detailed local information.⁵ While both Latin A and B share almost the same episodes at different lengths of elaboration, such as Frideswide's miraculous learning of psalms, her ascetic practices, and her performance of various miracles, each *SEL* version seems to select what to adopt or omit from one of the Latin versions, leading to the differences between the two versions as Reames suggests.⁶

The frequent appearance of the *vitae* of Frideswide in seven *SEL* manuscripts can be explained by the fact that the textual transmission of the Latin *vitae* of Frideswide originated in Worcestershire. The production of the *vitae* of Frideswide has a close connection with Worcestershire where the *SELS* were originally produced. The provenance of both Latin manuscripts that contain full texts of Latin A and B is Worcestershire: Latin A (London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero E. 1) in

⁴ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p.196.

⁵ Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 24.

⁶ See Blair's parallel summaries of Latin Lives A and B, 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', pp. 74-79.

Worcester; Latin B (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 114) in Pershore.⁷ Yet, this also remains hypothetical: although the *SELS* originated in Worcestershire, none of the extant *SEL* manuscripts that include the *vitae* of Frideswide, clearly indicate a Worcestershire provenance.

Unlike the other four native women, Frideswide appears in a different manuscript tradition, as well as the ‘E’ branch manuscripts, which suggests that she was not only a popular saint but also one of the earliest saint in the *SELS*. Both longer and shorter versions of her *vitae* appear in the E reduction: her longer *vita* appears in MS B, with other native female saints; the shorter *vita* is included in MS R, one of the four E branch manuscripts, which contains a group of additional English saints, although there are no other insular female saints apart from Frideswide. Frideswide is not one of the additional English saints, which Görlach groups together, like Æthelthryth, Edburga, and Mildred. The existence of Frideswide seems more established in the *SELS*, since she appears in an earlier manuscript. The inclusion of the longer version in MS A, dated between 1300 and 1330, suggests that Frideswide is a relatively old figure in the *SELS* among the native female saints who were usually added to later manuscripts in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁸ In MS A, the *vita* of Frideswide appears in the conventional order of hagiographical collections according to saints’ feast days, in line with other universal male, female, and native male saints, irrespective of her gender or locality. The existence of Frideswide in older manuscripts such as MS A suggests that her *vita* was most probably included at the early stage of transmission because her significance was equivalent to that of the

⁷ Blair, ‘Saint Frideswide Reconsidered’, p. 73, p. 93, and p. 101.

⁸ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, p. 74.

other saints.⁹

The *SEL* versions are obviously the most widely circulated *vitae* of Frideswide in Middle English, but there are also two other legends of Frideswide in Middle English: *Gilte Legende* and the sixteenth-century *Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande*.¹⁰ In *Gilte Legende*, the *vita* of Frideswide appears in its supplementary manuscripts (London, British Library, Additional MS 35298 and London, Lambeth Palace, MS 72), which show an interest in the inclusion of a number of native saints. As is often the case with the supplementary legends of native saints in *Gilte Legende*, the *vita* of Frideswide is based on the *SEL vita*, especially its longer version.¹¹ Referring to these sources, I will examine both versions of the *SEL* Frideswide. The textual variation enables further exploration of the construction of a *vita* of a medieval female saint.

2. Temptation of a Virgin

The first half of both *SEL vitae* of Frideswide closely follows the narrative patterns of the classical virgin martyr legends. As is the case with other medieval monastic women in the *SELS*, Frideswide is deliberately compared to classical virgin martyrs. This is more evident from the longer *vita*, which specifically refers to virgin

⁹ Liszka, 'The South English Legendaries', p. 39 and p. 38.

¹⁰ D'Evelyn and Frances A. Foster, 'Saints' Legends', in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, gen. ed. by J. Burke Severs, II (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1970), pp. 410-57 and pp. 556-635 (p. 588); Hamer and Russell, eds, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the 'Gilte Legende'*, p. viv. Görlach, ed., *The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande, ed. from Pynson's printed edition, 1516* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994), pp. 102-03.

¹¹ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 197; Hamer and Russell, eds, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the 'Gilte Legende'*, p. 151.

martyrs at the end of the narrative:

Tho caste heo up hire eien toward hevene an hei;
The maide Seynte Katerine and Seynte Cecile heo sei
With othere virgines mony on toward hire alight
Fram Hevene wel mildeliche - ther was a suete sight!
This holi maide with hem spac, as hurde mony on,
And sede, "In youre companye ichulle wende anon" (ll. 171-76).¹²

This symbolic vision of Frideswide joining a group of celestial virgin martyrs suggests the hagiographer's intention to place the narrative of Frideswide in the context of classical virgin martyrs. Yet, it is also true that hagiographers of medieval monastic women often faced the limitations of imitating classical virgin martyr narratives because of their circumstances in medieval England. 'White martyrdom', brought about from internal sufferings, and often associated with purity and virginity, as opposed to 'red martyrdom', or death after public persecution, often becomes a narrative pattern for medieval monastic women who ended their lives in their private space of nunneries.¹³ While the hagiographer compares Frideswide to classical virgin martyrs, the quoted passage also offers an image of a heavenly nunnery consisting of virgin martyrs. Following the convention of the classical virgin martyr legends, but with the addition of twists to conventional motifs appropriate to the

¹² This scene, where Katherine and Cecilia come to welcome Frideswide into the company of these famous virgins in heaven, was later reproduced in the nineteenth-century stained glass window designed by Edward Burne-Jones at Christ Church, Oxford. The first window of this sequence depicts Frideswide learning literature from Katherine, a protector of learning, and music from Cecilia, a patron saint of music. On the stained glass of Frideswide, see Edward Evans, John Buckley, and John McIlwain, *Christ Church Stained Glass Oxford* (Andover, Hampshire: Pitkin Guides, 1997).

¹³ On white and red martyrdom, see Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 63.

context of a female monastic community, the *SEL* hagiographers present the narrative of this medieval monastic woman as a story of a white-martyred virgin saint.

Frideswide's confrontation with a devil is highly reminiscent of narratives of virgin martyrs. In this scene, the *SEL vitae* depict Frideswide more eloquently than Mildred, Winifred, or Æthelthryth in the *SEL*. She is represented as a bold, unruly virgin who expostulates with the devil with a defiant attitude, in a way similar to classical virgin martyrs when they confront their opponents. While Frideswide calls the devil 'wrecch' (longer, l. 45) or 'foule fende' (shorter, l. 35), the devil's feebleness is emphasised, in contrast to Frideswide's spiritual strength: 'sori he was and wo' (longer, l. 55) and he runs away from Frideswide 'with noyse and grete cheste' (shorter, l. 36). The conversations between the virgin and the devil are reminiscent of those of virgin martyrs such as Margaret and Juliana, whose *SEL vitae* depict them abusing devils verbally and physically.¹⁴ However, even though Frideswide eventually wins victory over the devil as virgin martyrs do, the way in which she is confronted by the devil is different from virgin martyrs: here, the devil attempts to seduce Frideswide both sexually and spiritually.

In order to interpret the scene of temptation, it is also important to consider the influence from medieval virginity literature, as well as that of classical virgin martyr legends.¹⁵ Above all, the early thirteenth-century Middle English set of instructions for anchoresses, *Ancrene Wisse*, is an important subtext here, for sharing not only the

¹⁴ For example, see ll. 174-84 in the *vita* of Margaret, pp. 291-302, and ll. 77-123 in the *vita* of Juliana, pp. 62-70, in D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The SEL*, I.

¹⁵ On medieval virginity literature, see Wogan-Browne, 'The Virgin's Tale', in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All her Sect* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 221-45.

content of the theme of virginity, but also the same context, namely the manuscript with the lost *vita* of Frideswide. In MS V, the latter part of *Ancrene Wisse*, or ‘Roule of Reclous’, entered into the *Table of Contents*, is now lost, just like the *vita* of Frideswide itself, missing three folios which would have included some of Part 6, all of Part 7, and most of Part 8.¹⁶ Yet, it provides us with an important context in which the *SEL*, including the *vita* of Frideswide, would have been received by a similar audience to that of *Ancrene Wisse*.

Temptation is one of the most important trials not only for saints in their *vitae* but also for their readers to go through in their everyday life. In *Ancrene Wisse*, temptation is seen as a necessary trial for medieval virgins to train themselves spiritually. Suffering trials of worldly temptation is compared with martyrdom for medieval anchoresses, although they are not as severe as the torments of hell (66: 1-4).¹⁷ Part 4 of *Ancrene Wisse* explains various temptations, which could happen to religious women, categorising them into two kinds: physical (lechery, gluttony, sloth) and spiritual (pride, envy, anger, avarice). The temptation scene is concerned with various deadly sins. The devil approaches Frideswide because of his ‘gret envie’ (longer, l. 29) of Frideswide’s ‘godnesse’ (l. 30). Frideswide is then tested by the temptation which comes from lechery and pride.

In the beginning, the devil apparently attempts to seduce her sexually through his appearance and alluring words. In the legends of classical and early medieval saints, in most cases, sexual temptation happens to male saints. In contrast to female

¹⁶ Bella Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, EETS, OS 325 and 326, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

¹⁷ Arne Zettersten and Bernhard Diensberg, eds, *The English Text of the ‘Ancrene Riwe’: The ‘Vernon’ Text, Edited from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1*, EETS, OS 310 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

virginity, which is rather more directly threatened by attempted rape, male virginity and chastity are formed by overcoming temptation. Although it is not an absolute distinction between male and female virginity, Kathleen Coyne Kelly presents a view on the gendering of virginity: she argues that female virginity is often ‘assaulted’, whereas male virginity is ‘assayed’, in medieval narratives.¹⁸ John H. Arnold shows that the narratives of male virginity and chastity, especially in hagiography, feature male saints’ exercising will-power, bodily control, and chastisement.¹⁹ Most of these narratives are told through episodes of temptation by women both in visions and in reality. For example, as one of the tortures for Christians, two prostitutes are sent to defile Saint Christopher in jail, although their plot ends up with their own conversion by this saint (ll. 169-72).²⁰ The *SEL* *vita* of Saint Paul the Hermit begins with the saint’s witnessing a young Christian man, stripped naked, being aroused in his flesh by women, ‘to don lecherye’ (l. 15) and forsake his faith.²¹ This makes the saint decide to hide himself in a desert; but even in the desert, saints suffer from devils’ erotic plots. Saint Jerome famously confesses that he was often afflicted by visions

¹⁸ Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, p. 95. See also John H. Arnold, ‘The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity’, in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. by Bernau, Evans, and Salih, pp. 102-18; Cassandra Rhodes, ‘What, After All, Is a Male Virgin? Multiple Performances of Male Virginity in Anglo-Saxon Saints’ Lives’, in *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe: Construction, Transformation, and Subversion, 600-1530*, ed. by Elizabeth L’Estrange and Alison More (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 15-32.

¹⁹ Arnold, ‘The Labour of Continence’, pp. 104-06. See also Bernau, ‘Gender and Sexuality’, in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Salih, pp. 104-21 (pp. 114-15 and pp. 118-19).

²⁰ See ‘The Life of Christopher’ in Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by Ryan, II, pp. 10-14 (p. 13); and D’Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The ‘SEL’*, I, pp. 340-48.

²¹ See ‘The Life of Paul the Hermit’, in Horstmann, ed., ‘Des Ms. Bodl. 779 jüngere Zusatzlegenden zur südlichen Legendensammlung’, pp. 386-88; Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by Ryan, I, p. 84.

of young girls in the desert.²² Saint Bernard's chastity is often targeted by the devil's trials, being tempted by a young woman, sent from the devil, in order to sexually arouse him in his bed.²³ In contrast, there are few female saints whose virginity and chastity are tested by temptation. Among the non-virgin saints such as penitent sinners, Mary of Egypt is tested by the devil especially because of her spiritual resolution when she lives in the desert. As Jerome does, she suffers from 'hure flesses wille þoru þe deueles lore / of longed after mete & drinke and ele after weode / and ofte þouȝt of lecherie' (ll. 12-14).²⁴ As a virgin saint, Justine, of fourth-century Antioch, is an exceptional instance of a female saint who suffers from the devil's temptation. In the *SEL vita* of Justine, which shares some of the same manuscripts containing Frideswide, she is, like the male saints above, tempted by a devil that appears to her at night, and is also afflicted by erotic thoughts:

The devel wende forth bi nighte this holi maide to fonde
And in the fol thought broughte hir neigh ... (ll. 20-21).²⁵

As Arnold points out, this episode of Justine deals with a similar theme of male saints' resistance through their will-power, transposed into a narrative of a female saint.²⁶

Although in the legends of classical saints, the example of Justine is one of only a few female virgin saints who are tested by the devil's temptation, which most often

²² Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by Ryan, II, p. 213

²³ Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by Ryan, II, p. 99.

²⁴ See 'The Life of Mary of Egypt', in D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 136-48.

²⁵ For the *SEL vita* of Justine, see pp. 173-78, and for modern English translation, pp. 35-39, in Winstead, ed. and trans, *Chaste Passions*.

²⁶ Arnold, 'The Labour of Continence', p. 109.

happens to male saints, Weinstein and Bell regard the motif of demonic visitation as one of the themes of visions and mystical experiences characteristically found in the legends of medieval female saints. In this theme, the devil appears in their anchorhold, or as in the example of Frideswide, in their bedchamber.²⁷ Weinstein and Bell's discussion here focuses on holy women between the eleventh and seventeenth centuries, including various types of monastic, lay, virgin, and non-virgin saints, and so the eighth-century Frideswide is an earlier example of a medieval holy woman who is tested in her chastity by demonic temptation. However, the significance of the theme of the temptation of a virgin deserves more attention as an example of female virginity which is tested rather than threatened, especially when we compare the episode in the *vitae* of Frideswide with those of classical virgin martyrs on which the *SEL vitae* of medieval monastic women are based. The hagiographers' intention to highlight this gender reversal in the hagiographic theme of temptation was certainly to show their medieval readers the spiritual strength of Frideswide.

In the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide, the episode of her customary asceticism is also told alongside her triumph over the devil's temptation. Weinstein and Bell argue that the episodes of asceticism, which is another common theme in the legends of medieval female saints, foregrounds typical views of female sex in the Middle Ages, consolidating beliefs in their frailties and sinful qualities, such as their vanity, lust, and frivolity.²⁸ Yet, what the *SEL* hagiographers of Frideswide aimed to emphasise was neither the strength nor the weakness of female sexuality in general, but a more gender-neutral virtue. In other words, they do not demonstrate the weakness of the

²⁷ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 229.

²⁸ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 234

female sex in general by presenting Frideswide as such an exceptional woman uniquely capable of overcoming temptation. The episode of sexual temptation in the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide is linked to the claim made in the ‘Defence of Women’ that criticises the sexual double standards in the Middle Ages. Giving an example of sexual temptation, the author of this work points out that men who defeat sexual temptation are often praised as if they were saints who deserve to lie in a shrine (‘worþ to ligge in crine’, l. 38), while women who do not succumb to it are not called ‘seint’ (l. 40); rather, should they make a single mistake, they are blamed more severely than men who fail in the same way. In contrast, the spiritual strength to resist temptation is a virtue which can equally be embodied in holy women as well as men. Through the hagiographic example of Frideswide, a virgin sexually tempted but defeating the devil, the *SEL* hagiographers attempt to break the sexual double standards surrounding sexual temptation.

In the medieval monastic context, the scene of the devil’s temptation in the *vitae* of Frideswide can also be read as a familiar warning to virgins, given that the theme of carnal temptation is often treated in medieval virginity literature. However, the way in which the *vitae* of Frideswide alert them to temptation is more complicated. The scene of temptation does not only reverse a classical hagiographic topos in the legends of male saints but also in virginity literature.

The fende hadde envye therof to hire goudhede
 And thought myd som gynne of goud lyf hure lede.
 To hire he cam hire to fonde, in one mannespr lyche
 In goldbeten clothes that semed swythe ryche.
 “My derworth mayde,” he sede, “ne thynke thee noght to longe.
 Tyme hit is for thy travayle that thou thy mede afonge.
 Ich am thulke that thou byst to: take now goud hede.
 Honoure me here, and for thy servyse ich croune thee to mede.”
 The fende hadde in his heved an croune of rede golde... (shorter, ll.

25-33).

While the shorter version only describes his appearance as ‘in goldbeten clothes that semed swythe ryche (l. 28)’, the devil in the longer version calls himself Christ, accompanying other devils, who pretend to be angels:

He sede he was Godes sone Jhesus fram Hevene igon
And the develen with him angles were echon.
“My lemman, com vorth,” he sede, “com vorth here anon,
Vor tyme it is that thou avonge with virgines mony on
The croune of joie, of blis that ilasteth ever bright,
That thou hast ofserved wel both dai and nyght ...” (ll. 33-38).

In terms of this scene of temptation, Reames points out that the motif of the devil in the guise of Christ is seen in the *vitae* of male saints, such as Martin of Tours.²⁹ In the *SEL vita*, Martin is visited not only by Christ, the Virgin Mary, and various saints such as Agnes, Peter, and Paul, but more frequently by the devil at night:

Þe deuel hadde to þis holi man gret enuye mid alle
Him to bitraye he com o tyme in reche cloþes of palle
Wiþ hosen & schon of briȝt gold swiþe fair was his face
Martin he seide wel þe beo ifonde þu hast mi grace
Ich am God þat þu seruest wel ... (ll. 229-33).³⁰

The devil’s appearance in ‘reche cloþes’ with ‘gold’, and his handsome countenance, makes him close to the character who appears to Frideswide in the shorter *vita*. To this disguised devil, Martin immediately answers back:

I nuste neuere quap þis gode man þat mi Louerd sede
Pat he wolde an vrþe come in kynges wede

²⁹ Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 33.

³⁰ ‘The Life of St Martin’, D’Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The ‘SEL’*, II, pp. 483-92; See also Horstman, ed., *The Early ‘SEL’*, pp. 449-56.

Bote ich mowe of mi Louerdes wondes in þe signe iseo
Oþer of his croiȝ ynele iloeoue noȝt þat hit beo ... (ll. 241-44).

Reames argues that a lesson drawn from this episode is that we should not recognise Christ by his royal power but by the marks of his suffering.³¹ Yet, Martin's question concerning whether Christ returns to the earth in the appearance of a king is important to note, because he often does so in the conventions of virginity literature.

Although medieval religious women were well informed about carnal temptation, spiritual temptation, or wooing by Christ, is also a familiar theme in virginity literature. The devil in the guise of Christ who seduces a religious woman is reminiscent of Christ the Lover-Knight, whose scene of wooing religious women is often sensuously depicted in mystic visions.³² Temptation of the flesh comes last in its importance of all seven temptations caused by deadly sins, and anchoresses are carefully warned about it in *Ancrene Wisse*. Yet, at the same time, Part 7 of *Ancrene Wisse* also depicts Christ as a desirable wooer. He passionately courts his lady by sending her his messengers and offering her presents. He also appears in front of her with 'his handsome face, as the handsomest of all men in appearance' ('his feire neb, as þe þe wes of alle men feherest to bihalden'; VII: 75-76) and with his 'words so beguiling' ('wordes se murie'; VII: 77), saying that he will make her queen (VII:

³¹ Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 33.

³² For the motif of Christ the Lover-Knight, see also Thomas Hales in Elaine Treharne, ed., 'The Love-Ron of Friar Thomas Hales', in *Old and Middle English, c.800-c.1400: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 352-57; Rosemary Woolf, 'The Theme of Christ the Lover-Knight in Medieval English Literature', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, 13 (1962), pp. 1-16. See also Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 70-73; Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 57-59.

80).³³ Although Part 7 of *Ancrene Wisse* is lost in MS V, an idea of Christ as a desirable lover is seen in one of the other devotional works in the manuscript. A *Talkyng of þe Loue of God*, followed by *Ancrene Wisse*, is a mixture of two texts associated with *Ancrene Wisse*, namely *Pe Wohunge of ure Laured* and *Ureisun of ure Louerde*, and it illustrates how Christ is passionately desired by the first-person female voice.³⁴ Female readers of these devotional works are encouraged to identify themselves with the female voice who is wooed by Christ as her lover. Following this tradition, the *SEL vitae* depict Frideswide as being wooed by the devil in the guise of the fair Christ with his words, and with the offer of a crown. Even though readers are informed in advance that it is a devil in disguise, and even for those who are familiar with the literary convention of Christ the Lover-Knight, it may still be tricky enough to tell Christ from devils disguised as Christ. In the longer *vita*, drawing attention from his audience, the hagiographer describes how Frideswide finds out that it is a false image of Christ:

Ne hure ye hou queynteliche the screwe it couthe bifynde?
 Nou luther thrift on is heved and on the companye bihynde!
 That maide hire bithoghte of this wonder cas;
 Hire inwit hire sede sone that it the devel was (ll. 41-44).

A series of the devil's trials requires the saint's acute sense of discernment. The scene emphasises Frideswide's 'inwit', or reason coming from inside of her, to

³³ Quotations from Part 7 of *Ancrene Wisse* both in Middle English and modern English translation are from Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, I, and Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse: Guide For Anchoresses: A Translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009).

³⁴ M. Salvina Westra, ed. and trans, '*A Talkyng of þe Loue of God*', *Edited from MS. Vernon (Bodleian 3938) and Collated with MS. Simeon (Brit. Mus. Add. 22283)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950).

discern what is divine and what is not.³⁵ Along with the inversion of the sexual temptation of male saints, the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide transform the mystical convention of representations of Christ into trials in order to test her chastity and spiritual discernment.

Frideswide is tested not only in her chastity but also in her humility. Part 4 of *Ancrene Wisse*, on temptation, begins with warning anchoresses of the temptation of pride, and provides them with remedies for overcoming it. The warning of the sin of pride detailed here is not limited to religious women, but there also existed sins of pride, such as pride of their virginity, and spiritual pride of female mystics leading to narcissism, and emotional self-indulgence caused by obsession with their lover, Christ.³⁶ Although it is not included in MS V, *Hali Meiðhad*, an associated text of *Ancrene Wisse*, also warns its monastic, virgin readers of pride in their spiritual status.³⁷ For religious women who are proud of their spirituality, the false appearance of Christ may be sufficient to mislead them. Furthermore, the devil's offer of a crown challenges Frideswide's spiritual ambition. The false 'croune' in the *vitae* of Frideswide is another distorted image of the reward offered in medieval virginity literature. In *Ancrene Wisse*, all the temptation promises 'the crown of life' as the reward for medieval virgins, if they can overcome it:

Blesset he is and sely. þat haueþ in temptacion mekenesse. For whon he is

³⁵ Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the 'SEL'*, p. 147.

³⁶ On pride of being a virgin, see Wogan-Browne, 'Chaste Bodies: Frames and Experiences', in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 24-42 (p. 26); on the pride of female mystics, especially beguines, see Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 139-41.

³⁷ See *Hali Meiðhad*, ed. by Millett, EETS, OS 284 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 21:15-23:8.

I.preuet hit seiþ, he schal beon I.crounet. mid þe croune of lif. þat god hap
bi hoten his leoue children (65:18-21).³⁸

Although this image of crowning is recurrent throughout Part 4, Frideswide is not easily deceived by the devil. Frideswide in the supplementary *Gilte Legende* even starts to give him a sermon on the sin of pride: ‘Thye grete pryde was cause of thye grete falle into the deepest pytte of helle, and so shalle alle tho that folowe thy steppys, for alweye grete pryde wolle haue a falle’ (ll. 30-33). In the context of MS V, concerning the reversed images of conventional topoi in contemporary devotional works such as *Ancrene Wisse*, which would have been read along with saints’ legends, the more readers are familiar with the conventions, the more those conventions are able to confuse them. At the same time, the audience is given an example of Frideswide in the *SEL* overcoming the devil’s tricks with her ‘inwit’.

The scene of temptation draws monastic women’s attention to their life in enclosure. The devil’s intrusion into Frideswide’s nunnery also warns nuns that the devil may appear in their secured, private space. The shorter *vita* of Frideswide provides us with details on the devil’s appearance which are omitted from the longer *vita*: the devil appears in a dormitory in her nunnery at night (‘A nyght, as this mayde was huresulf alon, / In hire bedes with hire sustren slepen everechon...’; ll. 23-24). This is reminiscent of Juliana, who is visited by the devil in the enclosed space of the prison, but here it is worth noting that the temptation happens in a

³⁸ According to Millett, the pronoun ‘he’ in MS V can be read as feminine. See Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, II, p. 135. Millett’s translation of this passage, based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, is ‘Happy and blessed is the woman who bears temptation patiently, because when she has been tested, it says, she will be crowned with the crown of life that God has promised to his beloved elect’ (p. 69). Between CCCC MS 402 and MS V, there are differences in selection of a few words, such as ‘Blesset’ (V)/ ‘Eadi’ (C), ‘mekenesse’ (V)/ ‘polemodnesse’ (C), and ‘children’ (V)/ ‘icorene’ (C).

nunnery, where nuns are securely enclosed, and even more importantly, in a dormitory.³⁹ According to Roberta Gilchrist, who has analysed the access maps of male and female monasteries, showing levels of permeability, medieval nunneries usually placed a nun's dormitory in 'the deepest, most inaccessible, space' of the building.⁴⁰ The devil's intrusion into Frideswide's dormitory fundamentally threatens the supposedly impermeable community of religious women and this episode warns readers of the vulnerability of monastic enclosure. And, along with the vulnerability of the architectural enclosure, this reminds of the fact that nuns themselves are also in danger. Even though they are physically intact, their spiritual weakness can cause the breakage of the enclosure.

Although the lessons drawn from this episode, such as the devil's omnipresent and deceitful nature and the importance of spiritual discernment, are beneficial for instructing a wider audience, the *vitae* of Frideswide are perhaps most appropriate for female monastic readers to learn themes of virginity, enclosure, and their vulnerability. They would have most probably been read by nuns, since one of the manuscripts, MS V, was presumably produced for nuns, even though the *vita* of Frideswide is lost from this manuscript.⁴¹ Also, within the text the intended audience is often gendered as feminine. According to Catherine Sanok, the invention of a feminine audience and the feminisation of the audience are characteristic of

³⁹ See 'The Life of Juliana', in D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 62-70.

⁴⁰ Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 163-66.

⁴¹ Blanton, 'Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers', p. 241.

On the female, and especially nuns, as a possible primarily intended audience of the MS V, see for example, Meale, 'The Miracles of Our Lady: Context and Interpretation', p. 135; Blake, 'Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organisation', in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, p. 58.

Middle English legends of female saints.⁴² The same holds true for the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide. In the shorter *vita*, when the hagiographer mentions Frideswide's ascetic life, such as wearing a haircloth, eating barely anything but bread and vegetables, and drinking cold water, he states: 'Now wold a knyghtes doughter grete hoker of suche sondes thynke!' (l. 12). His reference to a knight's daughter importantly indicates his target audience in terms not only of gender, but also of their social class and age. Some of the knights' daughters were also would-be nuns in the Middle Ages. Possibly reflecting on the aristocratic and middle-class social values involved in sending daughters to nunneries, the shorter *vita* also states that Frideswide's father-king does not think it is a 'schame' (l. 20) when he asks a bishop to make his daughter a nun.⁴³ Moreover, in the longer *vita*, concerning her pious life in a nunnery, the hagiographer describes, by referring to women in general: 'More goodnesse then heo dude, me nuste no womman do' (l. 28). Comparison with ordinary women in order to emphasise the virtue of the female saints is often seen in the *SEL vitae*. The same rhetoric is used in the *vita* of Æthelthryth, when her virtue as a wife is praised by comparing her with 'oper wiues' (l. 15). Yet, although the references to a female audience in the *vitae* of Frideswide may give a somewhat misogynistic impression to readers, as the hagiographers seemingly reduce the status of ordinary women and generalize in their views on them, the frequent references to women rather suggest that the *SEL* hagiographers always bear their female audience in mind.⁴⁴ This is more obvious in comparison with the original Latin *vitae*. Both

⁴² Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 24-49.

⁴³ Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ It is also of note that the hagiographer of the longer *vita* also praises a non-saint woman, Frideswide's female teacher, Ailgive, as a 'good womman' (l. 11).

Latin A and B state that all people in England are surprised at Frideswide's saintly achievements at a tender age. While they refer more generally to English people, the *SEL* hagiographers specifically compare her with women to emphasise her exceptionality.⁴⁵ It is clear that the hagiographers of the *vitae* of Frideswide regard women as a significant part of their audience.

The *vitae* of Frideswide demonstrate the vulnerability of monastic enclosure in various ways. In fact, as an institution, the Priory of St Frideswide, as well as her shrine, experienced a number of disturbances to its monastic enclosure under the name of reformation throughout the Middle Ages. By the time her *SEL vitae* were produced, St Frideswide's Priory no longer existed as a nunnery or a double monastery, but had been replaced by a minster in the ninth and tenth centuries for secular clerics who engaged with producing pastoral works, without being strictly ordained by any religious order.⁴⁶ It had then been reformed into a priory for Augustinian canons in the twelfth century. The longer version mentions St Frideswide's Priory at this time, stating: 'Theras of Seynte Fredeswide an chirche nouthe is / And an hous of religion of blake canouns, iwis' (ll.19-20). During this period, the translation of Frideswide was conducted following discovery of her relics and the building of a new shrine for her.⁴⁷ The shorter *vita* mentions the location of her tomb in the priory: 'In Seint Marie church ... that mayde ... lyth yshryned ther' (ll. 14-16). Robert of Cricklade's Latin *vita*, namely Latin B, was produced to revive

⁴⁵ On Latin A, see Chapter 4 in Blair, ed., 'Appendix A: The First Life of St. Frideswide ("Latin A")', in 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', pp. 93-101, and Blair, trans., 'The Early Twelfth-Century Life ("Life A")', p. 30; on Cricklade's Latin B, see Blair, ed., 'Appendix B: The Second Life of St. Frideswide ("Latin B")', in 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', pp. 101-117.

⁴⁶ Blair, *Saint Frideswide: Patron of Oxford*, with wood-engravings by Kathleen Lindsley (Oxford: Perpetua Press, 1988), p. 18.

⁴⁷ Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 23.

her cult in Oxford in order to legitimise St Frideswide's Priory's claim to her relics over Abington Abbey.⁴⁸ However, as is often the case with insular female saints, her cult site did not remain in the post-medieval period. In the sixteenth century, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey launched a reformation of monasteries into new educational institutions. With consent from the Pope, he suppressed St Frideswide's Priory to make it into his own college 'Cardinal College', in 1527. The college was dedicated to Frideswide, as well as the Holy Trinity, the Virgin, and All Saints. After Wolsey's downfall, the college was taken into the possession of Henry VIII, and newly named Christ Church.⁴⁹ Shortly after the foundation of the college in 1538, the shrine of St Frideswide was demolished and most of her relics were apparently lost.⁵⁰ Yet, there is a peculiar episode in which a certain woman's bones were mixed with Frideswide's. Catherine Martyr of Christ Church in Oxford, who was a victim of the Marian persecutions, was exhumed after her first burial and reburied in the shrine of Frideswide. James Calphill, an Elizabethan priest in Oxford in 1561, ordered the translation of Catherine so that she could keep herself from further posthumous humiliation of her body by being buried with Frideswide.⁵¹ A history of St Frideswide's Priory, including her shrine, from its foundation as a double

⁴⁸ Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 24; Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative*, pp. 142-43.

⁴⁹ Henry L. Thompson, *Christ Church* (London: F. E. Robinson, 1900), pp. 2-3.

⁵⁰ Henry L. Thompson, *Christ Church*, p. 11.

⁵¹ Carole Levin, 'St. Frideswide and St. Uncumber: Changing Images of Female Saints in Renaissance England', in *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*, ed. by Mary Elizabeth Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda Dove, and Karen Nelson (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 223-37 (pp. 233-37); On a history of the shrine of Frideswide, see also Blair, 'Frithuswith (d. 727)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10183>> [accessed 20 Nov 2014].

monastery through to the incorporation into Cardinal College, now Christ Church, also suggests the vulnerability of monastic enclosures, many of which were broken throughout history.

3. A Virgin and a City

Unlike the devil's temptation that tests her chastity and humility, the next trial given to Frideswide involves more direct threats to her and also her city by her suitor king. In this episode, as Frideswide's monastic enclosure is violated by the devil, the walled city of Oxford is threatened with invasion by the king. After his failure to corrupt her by temptation, the devil inflames carnal desires for Frideswide in King Algar of Oxford. When Frideswide rejects his proposal to marry him, Algar is so enraged that he decides to make her his own by force. The pursuit by unwanted suitors is commonly seen in the legends of virgin saints. Algar's intention to rape Frideswide is explicit, as the aggressive expression of his sadistic desire clearly shows:

Vor heo me hath so vorsake, ichulle do bi hire folie;
And wen ichabbe bi hire ido my wille of lecherie,
Ichulle bitake hire hose wole, stronge lechors and store,
That wen heo vorsaketh me, heo schal be comun hore! (longer, ll. 81-84)

His declaration that he will corrupt Frideswide as a 'comun hore' is highly reminiscent of the narratives of virgin martyrs, such as those of Agnes and Lucy, in which they are sent to brothels by their male tormentors.⁵² Depicted as sexually

⁵² On the *SEL vitae* of Agnes and Lucy, see respectively Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 181-84, and D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 19-25; Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 101-106, and D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, II, pp. 566-71.

driven, Algar also intends to defile her holy life and holy virginity, which are symbolised by her nun's habit:

And ofte entised him in thoght and in metynge
That he scholde this maide of hire holi lif bringe,
And ligge bi hire flescliche and bynyme hire also
Hire abit of nonne that heo was inome to (longer, ll. 57-60).

Algar's desire is more transgressive, because it is targeted at a nun, who is married to Christ and is supposedly protected from worldly corruption. Here, her virginity as well as her monastic, social, and legal status as a bride of Christ, is threatened within the secular framework of marriage. The nuns' struggles to remain virginal and reject secular marriage are similar to those of virgin martyrs, as both are brides of Christ, but in the case of medieval nuns and abbesses, their social status as monastic virgins is equally important, as they are socially and legally regarded as brides of Christ under the vow of chastity in medieval society. In the *vitae* of Frideswide, what is threatened is not only her virginity, but also her social and spiritual decision to serve God as nuns and abbesses without getting married. Compared to other abbesses, they are never threatened by their suitors after their veiling. Both of the nunneries where Æthelthryth and Mildred temporarily spend time are nearly broken into by their suitors, but it happens before they actually take the veil. Yet the virginity of Frideswide is not secured even though she is in a nun's habit. The *vitae* of Frideswide again demonstrate the possibility that enclosed communities of nuns could also be penetrated by outsiders. In fact, there were apparently kings such as Algar who attempted to seduce nuns in Frideswide's time. For example, in 745-746, slightly after Frideswide's death, Boniface sent a letter to Æthelbald, a king of Mercia, to reproach him for having affairs with nuns:

And what is much worse, those who told us add that you have committed these sins, to your greater shame, in various monasteries with holy nuns and virgins vowed to God...Among the Greeks and Romans a candidate for Holy Orders is closely questioned before his ordination about this sin, implying that anyone found guilty of it has committed a blasphemy against God, and if found guilty of having had intercourse with a nun veiled and consecrated to God he is debarred from entering the ranks of the clergy (pp. 121-22).⁵³

In the letter, Æthelbald is, like Algar, compared to a devil who commits evil acts. It is not clear whether Algar is modelled on Æthelbald; the character of Algar is more likely a variant of the hagiographic topos of holy virgins' male opponents.⁵⁴ Algar's threats are directed not only at Frideswide but at the virginity of the nuns, which is supposed to be secure in the monastic enclosure.

The *vitae* of Frideswide develop unexpectedly when the sexually driven king attempts to conquer her city, accompanied by his army, in order to possess her body. The relationship between a city and a saint as its patron is commonly found in the cult of saints. The tradition of saints as city protectors dates back to the period of the Roman Empire, where each city functioned as a social unit.⁵⁵ Although relationships between saints and cities are often seen in hagiographic texts, the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide elaborate on these relationships from the perspective of the female saint's virgin body. Keith D. Lilley argues that the medieval city was often regarded as a

⁵³ C. H. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany, Being the Lives of SS. Willibrord, Boniface, Sturm, Leoba and Lebuin together with the Hodoeporicon of St. Willibald and a Selection from the Correspondence of St. Boniface* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954).

⁵⁴ Blair, 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', p. 90.

⁵⁵ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 224.

macrocosm of a human body, as well as a microcosm of the universe.⁵⁶ In particular, it is compared to Christ's body, both literally and metaphorically, as urban events such as Corpus Christi processions demonstrated.⁵⁷ Female saints played a particularly important role as defenders of their cities, as their virgin bodies are often compared to a city which is never penetrated. For example, Saint Werburga is well known as a virgin patron of Chester. She preserved her chastity and incorrupt body from a number of sexual threats, even after her death in the Danish raids.⁵⁸ Many point out a close relationship between Werburga's civic patronage and her virgin body. In the geographical context of Chester in the borderland areas, where the city was continuously threatened by outsiders, Katherine J. Lewis argues that the episodes of Werburga's virginity strengthen her power to defend Chester by virtue of her virginal, impermeable body.⁵⁹ Also, Liz Herbert McAvoy states that the town of Chester is often identified with Werburga's body, and its intactness, preserved with 'a sacred seal', also stabilises the town itself in a metaphorical sense.⁶⁰ Among various benefits which a city receives from its patron saint by possessing the saint's body, the fortification of the city is particularly important when that saint has a virginal body.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Lilley, *City and Cosmos: The Medieval World in Urban Form* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), p. 7.

⁵⁷ See Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, pp. 158-84.

⁵⁸ Alan Thacker, 'Werburgh (d. 700x07)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29062>], accessed 28 April 2013].

⁵⁹ Lewis, 'History, Historiography and Re-writing the Past', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Salih, pp. 122-40 (pp. 136-37).

⁶⁰ McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), p. 171.

⁶¹ For various discussions on medieval Chester, see Catherine A. M. Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 90-129;

The theme of a female saint's body as a city and vice versa is similarly observed in the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide. Through episodes of her virginity, which is continuously tempted and threatened by outsiders, but never allows any invasion, the impermeability of her body becomes directly linked with the impregnability of the city. Just as her virgin body is imaged as an enclosed space of her monastery, it is compared to a larger architectural enclosure, or the walled city of Oxford.⁶² Oxford is one of the *burhs*, meaning 'fortified places', founded in rectilinear form at the end of the ninth century, along with Cricklade, Wallingford, and Wareham.⁶³ The *SEL vitae* of Frideswide interestingly contain images of a *burh* in Oxford as a walled city. When Frideswide hears the news that the King of England is attempting to invade Oxford with his army, by divine miracle the king falls down from a horse and breaks his neck when he comes close to 'the gate' of Oxford (shorter, l. 89) or is struck blind at 'the North Gate' (longer, l. 102) of the city. Monika Otter argues that this symbolic episode of the king's invasion of the city of Oxford can be considered an act of sexual violence against the saint's body at the metaphorical level, based on an idea of invasion of a city as penetration of a body.⁶⁴ The word 'gate' is also an important signifier of a female body. Otter points out that in Ovidian myths the female body and a virgin's hymen are equated with a city and a gateway

Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester c. 1200-1600* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011).

⁶² On the tropes of the female body imaged as architectures of citadels, castles, and towers, see Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 87-116.

⁶³ Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, pp. 42-43.

⁶⁴ Monika Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', *Exemplaria*, 9.1 (1997), 139-63 (pp. 161-62).

respectively.⁶⁵ Yet, as rape is never consummated in virgin martyr legends, Oxford's walled city, as well as Frideswide's virgin body, defends itself from attempted rape in both the literal and metaphorical senses.

The episode of Frideswide's defence of the city from Algar spread outside Oxford and was passed on to later generations with great fear, especially among English kings. As the longer *vita* briefly describes that 'Ther ne dar no kyng in Oxenford yut to this day come' (l. 108), this episode is also recounted as an important historical event in chronicles. For example, *Polychronicon* states that since then kings of England have feared entering the city of Oxford:

Whom Algarus the kyng foloyng for pleasure of the flesche unto the cite Oxenforde, that virgyn entrede into the cite, the zates were closed by miracle, and the kyng was made blynde. Neverthelesse, his sighte was restorede at the preyere of that blissede virgyn. From whiche tyme kynges of Ynglonde drede and fere to entre into that cite lest that they have eney infortuny (6:24).

According to another chronicler, Thomas Wykes, writing in the thirteenth century, this tradition had been observed by kings such as Henry II and Edward I until his time, when Henry III entered her priory in Oxford 'with great devotion' for the first time since King Algar.⁶⁶ As these episodes demonstrate, the walled city of Oxford becomes strengthened more solidly after the crisis and Frideswide's miraculous salvation of the city.

Behind the episode of Algar's invasion of Oxford, there is also a political issue over the hegemony of Oxford. In the beginning of her *vita*, Frideswide is implied to

⁶⁵ Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', pp. 161-62.

⁶⁶ John Blair, 'Frithuswith', *ODNB*.

be her father, King Dydan's, only heiress.⁶⁷ Frideswide is born as the heir of King Dydan and Queen Saffride ('This maide of hem tuo, / Seynte Fredeswide, com and hor eir was also.'; longer, ll. 7-8). When Frideswide loses her mother at a young age, she also persuades her father not to take another wife. As for Algar, while the longer *vita* does not reveal his identity clearly, the shorter *vita* states that Algar becomes the king of Oxford, succeeding Frideswide's father (ll. 39-40). In Latin A, Algar is specified as the King of Leicester, but he also succeeded to the kingdom of Dydan. In other words, Algar is a king governing Oxford, but then oddly attempts to invade his own domain. The longer *vita*, based on Robert's reworked version of Latin A, seems to make a revision on this point, by stating more ambiguously that he is a 'kyng ... of Englonde' (l. 56). Algar is apparently absent from the city of Oxford, as is shown by the episodes where he dispatches messengers to Frideswide's nunnery and rides to the city gate of Oxford. Thus, the conflict seems to occur between the absent king with political power and the present abbess with monastic authority.

Conflicts between the king and the saint also divide the people of the city. When Frideswide flees from the king, Algar asks people to tell him where she is. Although there are local people who inform him that Frideswide has fled into the wood in the shorter *vita* (ll. 80-81), in the longer *vita* there are some who also attempt to help Frideswide run from the king, not telling the king where she is, even though they are threatened with death:

And wroth he was inou, vor he nuste war hire fynde.
 He asked that folc after hire, ac non ne couthe him telle.
 He suor bote hi tolde him other, mony mon to quelle,
 And throwe al the toun up-to-doun and bringe al to wrechede (ll. 98-101).

⁶⁷ Simon Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 174.

Algar's sadism is emphasised once again, threatening the people in the same way as he formerly did Frideswide, though now he threatens not only to kill his people but also to humiliate their dead bodies. He is presented as if a pagan tyrant who tortures and persecutes saints. His representation as a tyrant makes a sharp contrast with Frideswide as a patron saint of the city.

While in the longer *vita* this all happens during her refuge outside Oxford, in the shorter *vita* Frideswide defends herself and her city from the invader when she is inside the city. Reames argues that the route of Frideswide's flight in the shorter *vita*, leaving from Oxford, fleeing into the wood of Binsey, coming back to Oxford, and going to Binsey again, is confusing, and that this may have been caused by the hagiographer's misunderstanding of the topography in Latin A. Yet the shorter *vita* reaches the climactic moment of the king's sudden death after a series of events involving Frideswide, who runs into the city with the king following her.⁶⁸ For this miraculous salvation of Oxford, Frideswide is welcomed and eventually celebrated as a defender patron of the city when she later returns home. In the longer *vita*, Frideswide comes back to Oxford after she spends a few years outside the city, but her absence, as well as her presence, emphasises the borders of her city, serving to strengthen a sense of the local in Oxford, through her triumphal return home.

4. From the City into the Wood

The *vitae* of Frideswide do not only feature the saint's life in a city. The narrative tells how she starts to live in the wood where she founds a monastic community and establishes connections with local people after her flight from the walled city of

⁶⁸ Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 34.

Oxford. The theme of a nun on the run is common in the *vitae* of medieval holy women. For example, in the *SELS*, Mildred, Æthelthryth, and Winifred flee from secular marriages and threats of rape, and eventually find their own way into monastic shelters, sometimes moving from one nunnery to another. One of the notable characteristics in the legend of Frideswide is that her *vitae* devote much space to the saint's lengthy flight narratives. They characteristically retain geographic information from the Latin *vitae*: Frideswide travels down the Thames to the town called 'Benteme' (longer, l. 90) and then to the forest called 'Benesy' (shorter, l. 69) or 'Bunseie' (longer, l. 112). These details play an important role in localising Frideswide.

Given that most abbess saints' legends do not expand their travel narratives but stay focused in their life in nunneries, the episode of her flight in the *vitae* of Frideswide presents a different trope of a medieval monastic woman's narrative which is not confined to the enclosure. The nunnery is a place where the nuns' virginity is formed through physical enclosure, but in the case of Frideswide, the enclosure is not always secured but is continuously threatened in a series of events such as the devil's and the king's invasions. Frideswide therefore does not remain in her nunnery in Oxford: she escapes from her enclosure, traveling down to the town outside Oxford and starting a narrative in a non-enclosed space in a different, now non-urban landscape.

In the episode of her retreat from Oxford, Frideswide is depicted in a way reminiscent of a type of earlier saints different from virgin martyrs. When she hears about the king's invasion of the city of Oxford, Frideswide leaves her town and travels with the company of two nuns by water:

Ac this holi maide tofore myd two sostren wende

Into Temese in a scip as God the grace sende.
As sone as hi were in this scip, sodeinliche hi were
Under the toun of Benteme - hi nuste hou hi come ther (longer, ll. 87-90).

Frideswide is led by God rather than by her own will, travelling on a boat given by God, without knowing where to go. A woman travelling on a rudderless boat is a symbol of a pious woman tossed about by the weaving of their fate. The hagiographic topos of saints on boats is often seen in the *vitae* of earlier Celtic saints, such as Brendan, Ronan, and Columban. In their *vitae*, the sea is equated with the desert, the place where they are spiritually trained by God during their self-imposed exile.⁶⁹ As examples of women in hagiography who travel by water, there are Mary Magdalene, Ursula, and the mother of Thomas Becket, and their figures are sometimes compared with more familiar examples of heroines in ‘hagiographical romance’, such as Chaucer’s Constance, Emaré, and Florence who are also known as castaway queens.⁷⁰ Although it is not the wide ocean but the river on which

⁶⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 51; Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 18; Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 133-35.

On representations of sea in medieval literature, see Sebastian I. Sobecki, *The Sea and Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008); Sobecki, ed., *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011).

⁷⁰ On the *SEL* vita of Mary Magdalene, see D’Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The ‘SEL’*, pp. 302-14; On Ursula, see the *vita* of the eleven thousand virgins, pp. 86-92; On the mother of Thomas Becket, see the first part of the *vita* of Thomas Becket, Horstmann, ed., *The Early ‘SEL’*, pp. 106-12, and D’Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The ‘SEL’*, II, pp. 610-15.

For the similarities between the mother of Becket and Custance, see Lawrence Warner, ‘Adventurous Custance: St. Thomas of Acre and Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*’, in *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. by Howes, pp. 43-59 (pp. 51-55).

On Emaré and Florence, see Edith Rickert, ed., *The Romance of Emaré*, EETS, ES 99 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908); Carol Falvo Heffernan, ed., *Le Bone Florence of*

Frideswide travels, it is nevertheless important that both the Latin and Middle English hagiographers note the name of the river in her *vitae*. In the Latin *vitae*, the significance of the Thames is particularly highlighted, as the Thames brought Oxford social and economic prosperity.⁷¹ All these references to specific place names serve to domesticate the hagiographic topos.

Apart from Oxford, Bampton and Binsey are the two main sites dealt with by the *vitae* of Frideswide. In the Latin A, Frideswide is washed ashore at the town of Bampton and hides herself in the forest of Binsey. Although Binsey is described as being ‘not far from the town’ (p. 34) in Latin A, it is actually located about thirteen miles from Bampton.⁷² Blair suggests that the hagiographer of Latin A conflates the two separate traditions of miracle episodes which happened respectively at Bampton and Binsley. In Latin B, Robert of Cricklade corrects this confusion, stating that Frideswide travels on to Binsey after staying at Bampton for three years.⁷³ In the shorter *vita* of the *SEL* Frideswide, based on the translation of Latin A, the name of Bampton is omitted. It thus removes geographic confusion concerning the distance

Rome (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).

The image of Frideswide who travels on a boat with her sister nuns and founds a female community in the place where she casts ashore, is reminiscent of the myth of Albina, a female founder of Britain. For the Albina legend, see Lesley Johnson, ‘Return to Albion’, *Arthurian Studies*, 13 (1995), 19-40; Evans, ‘The Devil in Disguise: Perverse Female Origins of the Nation’, in *Consuming Narratives: Gender and Monstrous Appetite in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by McAvoy and Teresa Walters (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), pp. 182-95; Tamar Drukker, ‘Thirty-Three Murderous Sisters: A Pre-Trojan Foundation Myth in the Middle English *Brut* Chronicle’, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 54 (2003), 449-63; Bernau, ‘Beginning with Albina: Remembering the Nation’, *Exemplaria*, 21.3 (2009), 247-73.

⁷¹ Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities*, p. 176; Blair, ‘Frithuswith’, *ODNB*.

⁷² Blair, trans., ‘The Early Twelfth-Century Life (“Life A”)’, in *Saint Frideswide: Patron of Oxford*, pp. 29-39; Blair, ‘Saint Frideswide Reconsidered’, p. 84.

⁷³ Blair, ‘Saint Frideswide Reconsidered’, pp. 84-85.

between Bampton and Binsey which occurs in Latin A, although the first miracle of healing a blind girl actually happens at Bampton, not Binsey, as both Latin A and B clearly state. In the longer *vita*, Frideswide's life in refuge at Bampton is briefly told: she is at Bampton when she remotely prevents the king from entering through the city gate. Yet a number of miracles happen after Frideswide travels to Binsey. The *SEL* narrative then focuses on telling her miracles at Binsey.

Although both Bampton and Binsey have equally significant religious sites in the cult of Frideswide, Binsey is perhaps more distinctive, since it has a significant natural cult site and is a remote centre for the veneration of Frideswide. According to Blair, medieval Binsey was a place of 'undisturbed calm', remote enough but accessible from the city of Oxford.⁷⁴ As is told in the longer *SEL vita*, there is a chapel built for her nuns from Oxford; also there is a miraculous well which Frideswide causes to appear for her sisters.⁷⁵ As is the case with saints' holy wells such as Winifred's, it becomes a cult site in a natural landscape, but equally important as her shrine in the city.

Binsey has another significant role to play in the *SEL vitae*, as this place provides the narrative with a landscape, different from the urban landscape of Oxford. Binsey is referred to differently in each *vita*. While in the shorter *vita*, it is described as 'a wode' (l. 70), it is 'the toun of Bunseie' (l. 112) in the longer *vita*. Although the way in which the shorter *vita* depicts Frideswide's hermitage is closer to images of a natural landscape, with words such as 'hole' and the recurrent use of 'wode' (l. 73, l. 76, l. 81, and l. 82), the longer *vita*'s description, even though the hagiographer states

⁷⁴ Blair, 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', p 92.

⁷⁵ See Lydia Carr, 'Pilgrimage to Binsey: Medieval and Modern', in *Binsey: Oxford's Holy Place: Its Saint, Village, and People*, ed. by Carr, Russell Dewhurst, and Martin Henig (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), pp. 81-88.

that Binsey is a town, also contains topoi of a wooded landscape in the following miracle episodes which involve a spring and a woodcutter.

Frideswide's life in the woodland at Binsey has an eremitic nature. The landscape of Binsey also offers enclosure in nature. At Binsey, there is an enclosed place called 'Thornbiri', meaning 'thorn fortress' or 'thorn enclosure'. Robert's *vita* states that Frideswide and her company settle in this enclosure because of its loneliness and suitability for devotion.⁷⁶ The sub-oval earthwork which remains at Binsey is identified as Frideswide's 'Thornbiri'.⁷⁷ The shorter *vita* states that Frideswide chooses another enclosed life in a 'hole' with her nuns in this natural enclosure to keep them out of sight from anyone else:

For dred of the king heo wende, as God hit wolde,
Ne dorste heo come at non toune, to dwelle at non holde.
In a wode that Benesy yclyped ys al day
Thre wynter in an hole woned, that seylde me hure say (shorter, ll.
67-70).

Her life in a hole is highly reminiscent, not only of medieval anchoresses living in a hole-like cell, but also of holy hermits of late antiquity who lived in caves in the wilderness. The tradition of Christian eremitism began with John the Baptist, who wore a shirt of camel hair and lived on locusts and wild honey in the wilderness (Matthew 3: 4), and Jesus himself, who was led into the wilderness to be tested by a devil (Matthew 4: 1). As these examples suggest, the wilderness is an important place where holy people live alone in strict asceticism, being subject to devils'

⁷⁶ Blair, with a contribution by Maureen Mellor, 'The Legends of Saint Frideswide: Part Two - Thornbury, Binsey: A Probable Defensive Enclosure Associated with Saints Frideswide', in *Binsey: Oxford's Holy Place*, ed. by Carr, Dewhurst, and Henig, pp. 57-74 (pp. 57-58).

⁷⁷ Blair, with Mellor, 'The Legends of Saint Frideswide: Part Two – Thornbury, Binsey', p. 57.

temptations for testing their faith, and these experiences eventually bring them spiritual growth. Following these biblical examples, early hermits, such as Saints Paul of Thebes and Anthony, chose eremitical lives in the wilderness.⁷⁸ The *SEL vita* of Paul the Hermit, a unique text contained in MS B, depicts the meeting of these two hermits in the desert.⁷⁹ Although the desert is used interchangeably with ‘wilderness’, the place that these holy hermits choose for their hermitage is simply described as ‘wilderness’ in the *SELS*. In the Life of Mary Magdalene, the wilderness is depicted as devoid of any human habitation, and even of plants or animals:

Pare nas no watur a-boute ne þare ne wax no treo
 Pat ani best mizhte onder at-route þe betere an ayse to beo (ll.
 543-44).⁸⁰

Along with Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt is another well-known example of a female hermit. Both female hermits repent of their worldly sins and devote themselves to penitence through living an ascetic life in solitude, as they are often called ‘holy harlot’ or ‘penitent sinner’ saints. Frideswide, on the other hand, is urged to hide herself from pursuers, since her virginity demonstrates her holiness. Although Frideswide has no need of penitence, the *vitae* of Frideswide emphasise her asceticism by borrowing the topos of holy hermits.

The wilderness is easily found in the medieval English landscape in the *vitae* of native saints. Early hermits such as Columban and Cuthbert choose to live their lives on islands.⁸¹ Given that Binsey is sometimes compared to an island because of its

⁷⁸ Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, pp. 48-49.

⁷⁹ See ‘The Life of Paul the Hermit’, in Horstmann, ed., ‘Des Ms. Bodl. 779’, pp. 386-88.

⁸⁰ See ‘The Life of Mary Magdalene’, in Horstmann, ed., *The Early ‘SEL’*, pp. 462-80.

⁸¹ See ‘The Life of Cuthbert’, in D’Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The ‘SEL’*, I, pp. 118-21.

isolation, Frideswide's settlement at Binsey reflects a convention of Roman-British 'Celtic' Christianity which started within non-urban areas, such as Columban's Iona and Cuthbert's Farne islands.⁸² In England, the holy hermit Saint Fremund, whose unique *vita* appears in MS S, forsakes his kingdom, flees to the wilderness (f. 146v), and finally settles down on an island. The *SEL vita* of Saint Guthlac describes that he aspires to reach a more remote wilderness, eventually arriving at a fenland:

he desirid wilderness 3if he my3t hit byse
as he wente and sou3t about a wilde mor he fonde
jn þe contre of Grauntebrigge þat was a wast londe
vp þe water of Grant and tildiþ norþ and souþ
þo he fond þis place þat somdel was wide and coup
he þou3t habbe jbleued þere and of askid how hit were
me told him of more wildirnesse 3ut þan was þere
a man he bede him lede þedir þat he þer jfounde
and he ladde þis holyman to þe ile of Craylonde
þer was wildernesse jnou3 þer ne dorste neuer er
noman byfore seint Gotlac ... (ll. 30-41).⁸³

In addition to remote islands and fenlands, it is often pointed out that medieval forests, as places of uncultivated wilderness, were often seen as equivalent to the desert-wildernesses in the period of the Bible and in the legends of earlier saints.⁸⁴ Jacques Le Goff traces a history of this topos, from the Biblical wilderness in the East, through the deserts and seas in Western saints' legends, to the forests where

⁸² Julian Munby, 'Binsey: A Church in its Landscape', in *Binsey: Oxford's Holy Place*, ed. by Carr, Dewhurst, and Henig, pp. 100-15 (p. 101); Martin Henig, 'St. Frideswide's Binsey as Sacred Space', in *Binsey: Oxford's Holy Place*, ed. by Carr, Dewhurst, and Henig, pp. 75-80.

⁸³ Quotations from the *SEL vita* of Guthlac are taken from readings of MS B in Whitney French Bolton, 'The Middle English and Latin Poems of Saint Guthlac', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Princeton, 1954, pp. 209-219.

⁸⁴ Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, pp. 54-58; pp. 10-19

hermits, who are often retired from knighthood, dwell in medieval romance.⁸⁵ Corinne J. Saunders further explores the topos of forests in medieval romance.⁸⁶ As they both argue, in medieval Europe, forests serve a similar function as deserts in the legends of earlier hermits. In fact, the desert-wilderness of late antiquity is adapted and domesticated in the medieval British setting. Jane Cartwright points out that in a Welsh version of Mary Magdalene, the desert where Mary lives as a hermit is replaced by a forest. She argues that this replacement is more relevant for Welsh audience, since it is the place where those who withdraw from the world dwell in literature.⁸⁷ In these medieval narratives, the forest is presented as a topos contrasting with the city, as the wilderness in religious writings is often opposed to the secular world.

Frideswide's retreat to a woodland setting does not, however, present a simple dichotomy between a city and wilderness or secular and religious. Le Goff describes the opposition between these two landscapes as 'what was built, cultivated, and inhabited (city, castle, village) and what was essentially wild (the ocean and forest, the western equivalents of the eastern desert), that is, between men who lived in groups and those who lived in solitude'.⁸⁸ His theorisation of the artificial and the wild importantly highlights the distinction, although not opposition, between the two different narratives of Frideswide which happen in both urban and natural landscapes. It can also be noted, however, that Frideswide's life in a 'wode' does not mark such a

⁸⁵ Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, pp. 47-59.

⁸⁶ Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. On the wilderness in the Bible and saints' legends as an origin of the medieval forest, see pp. 10-19.

⁸⁷ Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 138.

⁸⁸ Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, p. 58.

sharp contrast with the city of Oxford as Le Goff argues. The 'wode' in Binsey in the *vita* of Frideswide is closer to the woodland than the Biblical and hagiographical topoi of wilderness, deserts, or forests. According to Gillian Rudd, the woodland is defined as a place covered with woods, open to humans, and inhabited and maintained by them, while the literary concept of 'forests' (rather than 'Forests', often described with capital F to specify that they were the places owned by the king or lord for hunting in the Middle Ages) is often imagined as untouched, closer to the image of wilderness.⁸⁹ In retaining the natural wooded landscape, Frideswide's 'wode' has human habitation, which eventually allows her to come out of her cave and contact local people through the performance of miracles.

Frideswide's woodland is more likely a liminal place. In light of the concept of liminality, the narrative of Frideswide lacks the symbolic images that allow her to complete what anthropologists such as Arnold van Gennep and Victor W. Turner calls the 'rite of passage', or 'social drama', which Caroline Walker Bynum has reexamined by applying these anthropologists' theories to narratives of medieval religious women. Yet, the *vitae* of Frideswide are made up of the narrative structures of separation, margins, and reaggregation, along with transition of topoi, in which Frideswide is forcibly separated from her city, and lives in a marginal and liminal place, giving up her social status as a royal abbess in Oxford, and, after a few years' experience, she returns to her priory in the city.⁹⁰ Unlike other hermits and early monastics, it is also of note that Frideswide eventually comes back from her eremitical retreat to the city, where she decides to live out the rest of her life, rather

⁸⁹ Rudd, *Greenary*, pp. 48-49.

⁹⁰ See Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 80-81; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 27-51.

than in her hermitage in the woodland. Frideswide's return to the city highlights a characteristic of her *vitae* as a narrative of segregation and (re)integration via liminal experiences. While in anthropology the narrative of eventual reintegration usually brings further enhancement of the existing social structure through reversal and disorder, in the narrative of Frideswide, it serves to strengthen the enclosure of the walled city, through her movement and geographical transferral from the city to woodland, and from woodland to the city. Given that Turner ascribes liminality to the wilderness, and even though Frideswide's 'wode' is not a complete wilderness, but woodland, the topos makes an important transition in her *vitae*.⁹¹

5. A Saint as a Local Miracle Worker

During her retreat from Oxford, Frideswide establishes her fame as a miracle worker. The narrative at Binsey serves to provide another foundation story of how Frideswide sets up not only a monastic community but also her status as a local saint through the performance of numerous miracles. Similar to how earlier medieval monastics such as Benedict, who first lived in the wilderness in solitude, and eventually built their monastic communities, Frideswide extends her private eremitical life into the foundation of her own religious community:

... to servy Jhesu Crist a chapel heo let rere,
Ther is yut a vair court and a chirche vair and suete,
Arered in honour of hire and of Seynte Margarete (longer, ll. 114-16).

She will not come back to her nunnery in Oxford, even after she is released from the king's threats; instead, the narrative continues as Frideswide's foundation story,

⁹¹ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 81.

telling that she builds a chapel and works for local people. The *vitae* of Frideswide characteristically focus on two ways in which medieval nunneries were founded: by (secular) authority, usually given to a female member of royal birth; and by a group of people for a charismatic leader. The former was the most common way of foundation, often documented in hagiography and chronicles. Of the Anglo-Saxon royal female saints in the *SELS*, the nunneries of Mildred and Edburga were founded in this way, as well as Frideswide's nunnery in Oxford, which was built and given her by her father-king. Although it is difficult to find the latter sort of foundation in early hagiography, Sally Thompson points out that several nunneries were developed from a community of people who grouped around a female recluse, citing the example of the nunnery at Markyate, developed around the twelfth-century anchoress, Christina.⁹² The foundation of St Margaret's in Binsey is closer to this type, more rooted in a local community. The foundation of her own nunnery is further underwritten by a miracle: in the longer *vita*, Frideswide performs a miracle to spring a well for her nuns, when they complain about their labours in having to deliver water to their chapel. The existence of holy wells is important, as they produce cult sites in natural landscapes, strengthening a connection between saints and their land. Also, the episode in which Frideswide exercises holy abbatial authority supports the legitimacy of this chapel founded by her, elevating its foundation status to equal that of her priory in Oxford. Although in Oxford Frideswide was given the nunnery and her status as an abbess by her father, just as other Anglo-Saxon royal female saints in the *SELS* were, the narrative set in the woodlands also tells another foundation story; this time, she builds her own from the

⁹² Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries After the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 16-37.

beginning.

Once she founds a base for her activities in a local community, Frideswide performs a number of miracles through interaction with people in the woodland. The *SEL vitae* of Frideswide characteristically include more episodes of her miracles than those of other *SEL* insular female saints. Given that the performance of miracles serves as an important role in proving saints' sanctity, it is perhaps more important for holy confessors such as medieval nuns, who did not end their lives in red martyrdom, to show that they were witnesses of God, like classical martyrs. The *SEL vitae* of insular monastic women similarly give accounts of their miracles, but most miracles happen directly to themselves, such as the discovery of Æthelthryth's incorrupt body; or more frequently occur as signs of divine grace that save them from crisis, such as Mildred saved from her bullying abbess, Winifred from her brutal murderer, and Frideswide from the lust-driven king. Like Edburga, who cures the blind and sick, Frideswide performs miracles for other people outside her monastic community. The *vitae* of Frideswide contain five miracle stories in total: in the shorter *vita*, she heals a blind girl and a fisherman's madness; in the longer *vita*, she makes a spring appear for the convenience of her sister nuns, restores a wood-cutter's hands which he loses by accident, and, on her way back to Oxford, she cures a leper. The problems of people healed by Frideswide vary from physical to mental; from profession to profession (nuns, a fisherman, and a woodcutter); and between male and female. Since all these miracles are performed outside Oxford, her refugee life enables her to contact people with various backgrounds outside her enclosure.

Virginity often provides female saints with miraculous power, but one of the miracle episodes interestingly illustrates Frideswide's dilemma: how to be both a

miracle worker and a virgin saint. The longer *vita* contains an episode of Frideswide's encounter with a man with leprosy. The healing of the sick is one of the most typical miracles worked by saints and the curing of a leper by a saint's kiss is not uncommon in hagiography: for example, Martin cures a man with leprosy, and a medieval virgin saint, Milburga, does the same for a girl.⁹³ Yet the episode in the *vita* of Frideswide is not told like a saint's encounter with her worshipper, but interestingly emphasises Frideswide's virginal meekness at contact between the sexes. On her way back to Oxford, Frideswide meets a man who asks her to cure his disease, by insistently and impertinently requesting her to kiss him: 'Levedi, bidde ic thee, / Vor the love of Jhesu Crist, have mercy of me / And cus me with thi suete mouth, yif it is thi wille!' (ll. 145-47). The Latin hagiographer, Robert, describes his request as 'hard' ('durum'; 'dura'; p. 113), mainly because of the man's horrendous appearance caused by leprosy, but also because of her virginity. Robert states that since Frideswide is a virgin who never touches a man, it is a hard request for her to kiss him on the mouth (p. 113). While the Latin *vita* attributes her confusion to these reasons, the *SEL vita* seems to focus more closely on the latter, that is Frideswide's dilemma between her duty as a saint and her virtue as a virgin. In the *SEL vita*, Frideswide's confusion is simply but repeatedly expressed as her being 'sore ofschame' (l. 148), 'ofscamed sore' (l. 150): Frideswide, through sorely ashamed of his request, walks to him and kisses him nevertheless. Anne B. Thompson points out that the *SEL* version touches on Frideswide's interior feeling, as contrasted with the

⁹³ See the *vita* of Martin, ll. 181-82, in D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, II; A. J. M. Edwards, 'An Early Twelfth Century Account of the Translation of St. Milburga of Much Wenlock', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, 57 (1961-64), 134-51 (pp. 150-51).

narrator's overdetermined voice in the Latin version.⁹⁴ Frideswide's shame apparently comes from her virginity, as the *vita* focuses on communication not only between a saint and a worshipper, but also between a female virgin saint and a man. It states that following her 'suete cos', the man is made not only whole and sound, but transforms from a 'swythe grisliche' man into a 'vair man and clene'. Finally, the *SEL* hagiographer concludes this miracle episode by stating 'of thulke cosse there / Me thencth the maide nadde no sunne, of ordre thei heo were!' (ll. 153-54). Focus on Frideswide's act of kissing highlights her meekness as virginal virtue; it depicts Frideswide's confusion rather than emphasises the saint's authority to perform miracles through divine grace.

Frideswide's abilities as a miracle worker are well documented in the twelfth-century Latin collection of miracles. Philip of Oxford compiled a huge collection of posthumous miracles of Frideswide in the late twelfth century. *Miracula S. Frideswidæ* includes more than one hundred miracles attributed to Frideswide.⁹⁵ Behind the compilation of Frideswide's miracles lies what Rachel Koopmans calls the 'miracle collecting boom' in twelfth-century England. In the first quarter of the twelfth century, miracle collectors, driven by anxiety about saints' miracle stories being forgotten after the Conquest, actively compiled collections of miracles of English saints such as Swithun, Edmund, Æthelthryth, and Dunstan.⁹⁶ From the mid-twelfth century onwards, there was a surge in the production of miracle collections; miracle collections were produced for Cuthbert, William of

⁹⁴ Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the 'SEL'*, pp. 148-49.

⁹⁵ For the text of *Miracula S. Frideswidæ* by Philip of Oxford, see Benjamin Bossue, ed., *Acta Sanctorum*, October, 8 (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1866), pp. 530-90.

⁹⁶ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 92-97.

Norwich, Godric of Finchale, Germanus of Selby, Bartholomew of London, William of York, and Frideswide.⁹⁷ As is the case with these saints, the cult of Frideswide was also influenced by the successful promotion of the cult of Thomas Becket, from his martyrdom to his subsequent canonisation in the twelfth century.⁹⁸ Both the hagiographer and miracle collector of Frideswide were familiar with the cult of Thomas Becket: Robert of Cricklade is believed to have written the lost *vita* of Thomas Becket as well as the *vita* of Frideswide (Latin B); Philip of Oxford is apparently conscious of Thomas Becket by referring to him in his miracle collection of Frideswide.

Miracula S. Frideswidae begins with the *translatio* of Frideswide and miracles happened at her translation. One of the most distinct characteristics of this collection is that of the one hundred and ten miracles, more than half of the miracles happen to women. The gender of the beneficiaries sometimes tells of the characteristics of saints as miracle workers. For example, Cuthbert is known for his misogynistic attitudes towards his female worshippers, who were kept away from his shrines.⁹⁹ Henry Mayr-Harting argues that *Miracula S. Frideswidae* shows its preoccupation with women's sexual psychology, as there appear a number of women who have

⁹⁷ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 134.

⁹⁸ Henry Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Shrine: The Miracles of St Frideswide', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis*, ed. by Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (London: The Hambledon Press, 1985), pp. 193-206 (p. 195); Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities*, p. 169 and p. 177; Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 134.

⁹⁹ On the importance of gender of witnesses of saints' miracles especially for canonisation, see Katajala-Peltoma, *Gender, Miracles, and Daily Life*, pp. 28-38. On the misogynistic episodes of Cuthbert's miracles, see Victoria Tudor, 'The Cult of St Cuthbert in the Twelfth Century: The Evidence of Reginald of Durham', in *St. Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200*, ed. by Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1989), pp. 447-67 (pp. 456-58 and p. 465).

such problems.¹⁰⁰ For example, there is an episode of a female pilgrim who is, like Frideswide, tempted to commit a sin of fornication with her fellow pilgrims but, unlike Frideswide, cannot overcome temptation.¹⁰¹ Frideswide's appeal to women more than men was known to late medieval England. Her shrine attracted a royal female pilgrim, Katherine of Aragon, who visited Frideswide's shrine to pray for her pregnancy in 1518.¹⁰² The collection of miracles reflects on one of the characteristics of the post-Conquest miracle collections, which began to accrue episodes from outside male monastic communities and included saints' miracles which happened to lay people, including women.¹⁰³ The *SEL vitae* contain episodes of miracles performed by Frideswide during her lifetime rather than posthumous ones, but the variety of miracles and their beneficiaries in the *vitae* also show this tendency.

The communal sense of 'local' is produced by episodes of miracles which connect the saint with local people.¹⁰⁴ Local people in Oxford who venerate their patron appear in other medieval texts than hagiography or chronicles. In *The Miller's Tale*, a fabliau of the adulterous affair between a young wife and a scholar in Oxford, Chaucer characterises John, a local carpenter and cuckold husband, as a comic figure who frequently swears on Christ and saints. John's repertoire of saints includes Thomas Becket, Benedict, and Petronilla, as well as his local patron saint, Frideswide. He asks Frideswide, his curing saint, to help Nicholas, who he thinks

¹⁰⁰ Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Shrine', pp. 198-199.

¹⁰¹ Philip of Oxford, *Miracula S. Frideswidae*, Chapter 46.

¹⁰² Levin, 'St. Frideswide and St. Uncumber', p. 233.

¹⁰³ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁴ Blair, 'Frithuswith', *ODNB*.

goes mad by studying too much astronomy, but who in fact tries to beguile him in order to sleep with his wife:

This carpenter to blessen hym bigan,
And seyde, "Help us, Seinte Frydeswyde!
A man woot litel what hym shal bityde.
This man is falle, with his astromye,
In some woodnesse or in som agonye (I: 3448-52).¹⁰⁵

Chaucer often adds a local characteristic to his narrative characters by referring to local saints. John's swearing on Frideswide corresponds to another John, a Cambridge student, originally from the North East, in *The Reeve's Tale*, who swears on a Northumbrian saint, Cuthbert (I: 4127).¹⁰⁶ Chaucer's reference to Frideswide suggests that she was not just a local saint, honoured within the city of Oxford and its suburban areas, but was also recognised by people outside the district as a local saint of Oxford.

In the *SELS*, emphasis on her identity as a local saint in Oxfordshire also presents Frideswide as a national saint of England. Frideswide's status as a patron of Oxford was established after the official order to observe Frideswide's feast day throughout the university as well as the deanery of Oxford, made in 1398 by the bishop of Lincoln, to whose diocese Oxford belonged in the Middle Ages. The *SEL vitae* depict her not only as a local saint of Oxford but also as one of the national saints of England. For example, both shorter and longer *vitae* of Frideswide begin with the typical rhyme patterns seen in the *SEL vitae* of English saints:

¹⁰⁵ Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Ruth Huff Cline, 'Four Chaucer Saints', *Modern Language Notes*, 60.7 (1945), 480-82 (pp. 480-81).

Seint Fretheswyde, that holy mayde, was of Englonde;
Atte Oxenford heo was ybore, as ich understonde (shorter, ll. 1-2).

This rhyme of ‘England’ and ‘understand’ is commonly found in the beginning of the *vitae* of English saints, such as Swithun, Cuthbert, Edburga, and Guthlac.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the shorter *vita* claims that Frideswide holds an unrivalled position among English saints after describing Fridesiwe’s triumph over King Algar at the gate of Oxford:

Of hure holy lyf me told fer and eke nere,
Into alle Englonde that me wyste nas yholde hure pere (ll. 93-94).

As is suggested in ‘hure holy lyf’, written in ‘fer and eke nere’, a number of the *SEL* manuscripts selected Frideswide’s *vita* for their collections. The hagiographer of the shorter *vita* declares in a very straightforward manner that Frideswide’s status has reached that of a national saint.

This chapter has examined the *SEL vitae* of Frideswide with focus on topoi, namely motifs and places commonly found in hagiography. Although her urban narrative is concerned with her virginity, it is also clear that the hagiographers of Frideswide did not always follow, but occasionally departed from the existing narrative patterns. Adapting subtexts such as the *vitae* of classical male martyrs and medieval virginity literature, the hagiographers created a life of a medieval monastic female virgin, incorporating different tropes into the *vita*. In terms of topoi as places, the *vitae* of Frideswide focus on a saint in two different spaces, city and a woodland. Within the sphere of the walled city of Oxford, the narrative of Frideswide is made up of numerous concentric layers of enclosure: her virgin body; wrapped in her habit

¹⁰⁷ William Robins, ‘Modular Dynamics in the *SEL*’, in *Rethinking the ‘SELS’*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 187-208 (p. 195).

of a nun; the nunnery where she is enclosed; the walled city of Oxford where she is located. These layers of enclosure becomes more visible when they are threatened by invasion. By contrast, the second half of each of the *vitae* focuses on Frideswide outside of her enclosure. The narrative further extends to the suburban areas outside Oxford, a different landscape from the urban setting. The topos of woodland provides the narrative with an eremitic setting, highly reminiscent of a biblical and hagiographical wilderness, but also symbolises Frideswide's liminal status. The narrative presents another foundation story, which illustrates how Frideswide first starts with an eremitical retreat, founds her own chapel for sister nuns, and eventually establishes connections with local people as a miracle worker. The *SELS* thus present a different type of sanctity in a life of a medieval woman, by drawing upon various topoi from legends of other saints.

Chapter 2

Saint Æthelthryth of Ely and Making of a Local Saint

1. Introduction

While the *vita* of Frideswide appears in seven manuscripts in a different textual tradition, the *vitae* of the three Anglo-Saxon female saints discussed in this and the following two chapters, Æthelthryth, Mildred, and Edburga, are included in the same group of *SEL* manuscripts. Along with the other two female saints, Görlach states that Æthelthryth is regarded as ‘marginal’ in the textual tradition of the *SELS*.¹ Her *vita* appears only in three of the E branch manuscripts, and is much shortened into what is called an ‘epitome’ version, consisting of only fifty lines, which is about half the length of other *vitae* of female insular saints. However, as Major who edited the *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth claims, the importance of her presence in the *SELS* should not be underestimated.² As is demonstrated by a number of her *vitae* available in Latin, Old English, Middle English, and Anglo-Norman, the veneration of this saint is far from marginal in the broader context of insular hagiography.

Various *vitae* of Æthelthryth, both in prose and verse, were written in Latin up to the fifteenth century. Her life is well documented in Latin works such as Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* in the eighth century and Richard of Ely’s *Liber Eliensis* in the early twelfth century.³ These Latin *vitae* formed the

¹ Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, p. 17.

² Major, ‘Saint Etheldreda in the *SEL*’, p. 84.

³ See Book IV, Chapter 19 in Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed.

foundation for later production of *vitae* of Æthelthryth. In the vernacular there are a short *vita* in the *Old English Martyrology*, the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, and a brief reference in *þa halgan*, a list of saints' resting places.⁴ It is of particular note that, like that of Mildred, the *vitae* of Æthelthryth survived from the pre-Conquest period, while the *vitae* of the other Anglo-Saxon female saints, Frideswide and Edburga, cannot be found in any Old English *vitae*. Moreover, compared to Mildred, the number of the Old English *vitae* of Æthelthryth is notably large, suggesting that the legends of this saint had been read continuously in English from the Anglo-Saxon through to the post-conquest periods. One of the most distinctive characteristics which differentiate Æthelthryth from other Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the *SELS* is that her life is also written in Anglo-Norman: *La Vie Seinte Audrée* was translated by a woman called 'Marie' in the thirteenth century.⁵

Of various Middle English *vitae*, Virginia Blanton, who has explored the cult of Æthelthryth throughout the Middle Ages, lists four as major Middle English *vitae*

with an Introduction and Notes by Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 202-05; *'Liber Eliensis': A History of the Isle of Ely From the Seventh Century to the Twelfth, Compiled by a Monk of Ely in the Twelfth Century*, trans. with an Introduction, Notes, Appendices and Indices by Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005).

⁴ Christine Rauer, ed. and trans., *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 122-23; Thomas Miller, ed. and trans., *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People'*, EETS, OS 95, 110, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1890-1898), I, pp. 317-25; F. Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands* (Hanover: Hahn'sche Buchhandlung, 1889), p. 5; Walter W. Skeat, ed. and trans., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saint's Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, EETS, OS 76, 2 vols (London: N. Trübner, 1881), I, pp. 432-41.

⁵ June Hall McCach and Judith Clark Barban, ed. and trans., *The Life of Saint Audrey: A Text by Marie de France*, foreword by Emanuel J. Mickel (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006).

For a comprehensive list of the *vitae* of Æthelthryth between the eighth and seventeenth centuries, see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 9-10.

of Æthelthryth: the verse life from the manuscript owned by Wilton Abbey (London, British Library, Cotton MS Faustina B. III); the prose *vita*, based on the translation from John of Tynemouth's *Nova Legenda Anglie*, in a manuscript which also includes *vitae* of a number of Æthelthryth's female relatives (Cambridge, University Library, MS Additional 2604); a prose translation of the *Liber Eliensis* (Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 120); and the *SEL vita*.⁶ Along with these four *vitae*, there are a *vita* by Osbern Bokenham in his *Legenda aurea*, an epitome incorporated into Henry Bradshaw's *The Holy Lyfe and History of Saynt Werburge* as 'a litell treatise', and two printed *vitae*, based on the translation of *Nova Legenda Anglie* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁷ The *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth is based on Latin sources, including *Nova legenda Anglie* and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*.⁸ The wealth of textual production suggests that Æthelthryth was, uncommonly for native female saints, commemorated in various languages both in manuscript and print throughout the Middle Ages. While she was venerated continuously from the Anglo-Saxon to the post-Conquest period, Æthelthryth was also remade and reinvented as a national saint of England in the late medieval period. Æthelthryth was incorporated into hagiographic collections which demonstrate their particularly nationalistic nature by featuring and compiling a number of native saints. The *SEL vita* is obviously one of these post-Conquest

⁶ Virginia Blanton, 'Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers', pp. 242-43.

⁷ On the epitome of Æthelthryth in Bradshaw's *Life of St Werburge*, see Chapter 18 in *The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester by Henry Bradshaw*, ed. by Carl Horstmann (London: N. Trübner, 1887).

⁸ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 175; Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 241.

On the *vita* in *Nova Legenda Anglie*, see Horstmann, ed., '*Nova Legenda Anglie*', I, pp. 424-29.

collections which present Æthelthryth as one of the regional saints of England.

This chapter explores various ways in which Æthelthryth was made a saint, by reading the *vitae* of Æthelthryth as well as examining the various cult activities surrounding her. The cult of Æthelthryth is distinct from that of other abbesses because of the survival of various cult activities practiced in the context of the devotional culture that flourished in medieval East Anglia. Although hagiography is one of various media for venerating saints, it also plays an important role in producing both saints' cults and saints themselves. Sainly people become recognised as saints by their lives being compiled into collections of other established saints. In most *vitae* of saints, documentation of the miraculous often serves as important proof of their sanctity. In the veneration of Æthelthryth, preservation of her virginity, not only from her two earthly husbands, but also from posthumous corruption, is regarded as her most significant miracle. Æthelthryth's miraculous preservation of her physical purity in two secular marriages made her fame grow widespread not only in East Anglia but also across England, with her name listed with other English saints who were similarly exhumed incorrupt.

Various cult activities commemorate her as their own saint, with varying degrees of regionalism and nationalism. Blanton emphasises the importance of Æthelthryth as a regional saint of Ely. In her discussions of Anglo-Saxon female saints in the *SELS*, especially those who appear in the E redaction, Mildred, Æthelthryth, and Edburga, Blanton argues that these female saints play a role in narrating a regional history of England, as virgin daughters of Anglo-Saxon kings.⁹ Kerry Olsen, on the other hand, argues against this view, claiming that the texts' demonstration of regional history does not work successfully in the *SEL vita* of

⁹ See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 240-241

Æthelthryth because it lacks the required detail.¹⁰ Rather, Olsen points out her role as a national saint, stating that the *vitae* of Anglo Saxon female saints are more properly read as part of a general national impulse rather than representative of regionalism, although she does not go on to claim that the *SEL* version actively nationalises Æthelthryth. As Olsen points out, the *SEL*'s short *vita* of Æthelthryth does not explore details of this saint's regional identity, and especially not historical information about it. However, in comparison with other *vitae* of Æthelthryth, for example, the *vita* in Bokenham's *Legenda aurea*, the *SEL* hagiographer's intention to present Æthelthryth as a national saint of England is less than certain. Given that the *SEL* hagiographer consciously connects her with Ely and obscures other geographic information associated with her, I would suggest that in the representation of Æthelthryth in the *SELS*, the hagiographer presents her as a regional saint of Ely in the *SEL vita* as well as the whole collections.¹¹

In order to examine the hagiographic contexts in which Æthelthryth is situated, this chapter scrutinises the *SEL vita* along with supplementary texts in Middle English. I will refer most to a collection featuring East Anglian female saints in particular (CUL MS Additional 2604) and Bokenham's *Legenda aurea* as its contemporary Middle English *vitae*. Since these Middle English texts, unlike the *SEL vita*, are longer and more detailed, they can be compared with the *SEL vita* to reveal how the *SEL* hagiographer extracts events from her legends and focuses on specific matters in her life in the process of epitomisation. Also, they share similarities with the *SELS*, especially in terms of their compilation of legends of other native English saints. By examining hagiography as one of various cult, or

¹⁰ Olsen, 'Women and Englishness', p. 7; 'Questions of Identity', pp. 30-31.

¹¹ Olsen, 'Women and Englishness', p. 7; 'Questions of Identity', p. 180.

saint-making activities, I explore how the hagiographer remade Æthelthryth as a local saint in the *SELS*.

2. A Virgin Wife

As is the case with other holy monastic women in the *SELS*, Æthelthryth remains a virgin throughout her life. Her virginity plays an even more significant role in her veneration, as represented by her shrine, which encloses her arguably incorrupt body as a symbol of her virginity and marks her efforts to preserve it. The *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth consists of narratives of her two secular marriages, her religious life as a nun and then abbess in Ely, and the posthumous miracles that happened at the time of her translation. The importance of Æthelthryth's virginity is explicitly shown in the episodes of her marriages and her translation. The narrative of her marriage is a unique episode whose details cannot be found in other *SEL vitae* of monastic women who live unmarried. Yet, like other virgin saints in the *SELS*, the core theme recurrent in this episode is a hagiographic motif of threats to virginity, which are commonly found in the *vitae* of abbess saints such as Frideswide, Mildred, and Winifred. In the case of Æthelthryth, although her first marriage to Tondberht lasts only for a short time, her confrontations with her second husband, Ecgfrith, are the most difficult trials to test her vocation to Christianity, including preservation of her bodily purity. While the *vitae* of Frideswide and Winifred depict their male suitors as sexually driven rapists, and show the female saints attempting to avert various sexual advances by their refusal and flight (Frideswide) or deception (Winifred), it should also be noted that the suitor of Æthelthryth and the threat to her virginity, Ecgfrith, is not presented as a rapist and she, as his wife, tries to change his mind by persuasion.

Her marriage to Ecgfrith brings to the fore issues concerning how to depict this holy woman's marriage in medieval England.

From a modern historical viewpoint, Æthelthryth's marriage to Ecgfrith and her subsequent entry to the monastic life is told in a different way to that of the hagiographers. While she successfully preserves her virginity in her first marriage, until Tondberht dies, at the second time Æthelthryth eventually asks for permission to become a nun and terminate her marriage to Ecgfrith. Yet, the end of her second marriage can also be read as Ecgfrith's repudiation of Æthelthryth. One historian, Pauline Stafford, has seen the marriage between Ecgfrith and Æthelthryth, from a different perspective, in the context of kings' divorce and repudiation of their wives. She states that one reason why he agreed to divorce Æthelthryth was most probably because of her sterility, caused by her rejection of any sexual intercourse, rather than her religious vocation. And so, since nunneries in the seventh century also functioned to offer places for divorced wives, Æthelthryth's Christian vocation seems to be a perfect excuse for his divorce.¹² In fact, Ecgfrith, who, in hagiographic accounts, seems to have been convinced by the significance of spiritual marriage, took a second wife, called Iurminburg, after divorcing from Æthelthryth, although she did not bear any children with him either.¹³ Stafford's reading challenges the hagiographic episode of the practice of spiritual marriage. Considering this historicist interpretation, it is certain that, unlike the first marriage, the episode of the second marriage to Ecgfrith and their subsequent divorce posed problems for her queenship, caused by her refusal to produce heirs for her kingdom, and giving an

¹² Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p. 74 and p. 81.

¹³ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, p. 85.

example of incompatibility between secular marriage and religious faith in medieval England.

Yet, in hagiography, the issue of her divorce does not question her sanctity. Despite the possibility that Æthelthryth was repudiated and sent to a nunnery by her husband, hagiographers saw the episodes of her marriages and divorce as her victory in the test of her virginity. The episodes of Æthelthryth's surviving her marriages can be read in terms of the idea and practice of spiritual marriage, often found in hagiographic and quasi-hagiographic texts. In the custom of spiritual marriage, a wife and a husband abstain from sexual intercourse and keep their marriage chaste. The Virgin and Joseph, Cecilia and Valerian, and Alexis and his wife are hagiographic couples who maintain their chaste marriage.¹⁴ The episode of Cecilia and her persuasion of her husband on their nuptial night seems to have influenced religious women.¹⁵ In medieval England, some religious women tried to imitate Cecilia's attitude with their own husbands. Although it was ultimately in vain, Christina of Markyate attempted to persuade her betrothed into following Cecilia and Valerian.¹⁶ Margery Kempe, too, apparently tried to follow the example of Cecilia, even though her persuasion settled more realistically on a bargain in which her husband, John, agreed to Margery's vow of celibacy, in return for her payment of his debts.¹⁷ In her reading of Osbert of Clare's letter to Adelidis, abbess of Barking, in

¹⁴ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ On the *SEL* vita of Cecilia, see Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 490-96.

¹⁶ See *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 11-12.

¹⁷ See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000; repr. 2004), Chapter 11.

which Osbert praises the virginity of historical women, including Cecilia, Æthelthryth, Silvia, a Vestal virgin in Rome, and Judith, Wogan-Browne argues that Æthelthryth was a ‘primary insular incarnation of Cecilia’, while Cecilia represents a ‘universal virgin sanctity’.¹⁸ Although there is a difference in their status as saints (martyr or abbess), context (classical or medieval), and place (the Continent or England), Osbert’s juxtaposition of Cecilia and Æthelthryth suggests that other hagiographers of Æthelthryth may well have been conscious of this universal virgin saint, in terms of her oath to preserve her virginity, and her persuasion of her earthly husband to practice a chaste marriage, except that her death was not by martyrdom, but in a monastery, like other insular female saints.

The Wilton *vita* deals with the theme of spiritual marriage in more detail than any other Middle English *vitae* of Æthelthryth. Moreover, the scene of Æthelthryth preaching to Ecgfrith here is highly reminiscent of that of Cecilia and Valerian. The Wilton *vita* characteristically illustrates Ecgfrith’s struggles with his wife and his puzzlement about their marriage life. The role of husbands in this spiritual marriage in quasi/hagiographic texts is to respect their wives’ intention and to devote themselves, together with their wives, to the ascetic life. Yet, Ecgfrith, who now succeeds to the throne of Northumberland, decides to change her mind in order to bring him an heir. Interestingly, in the Wilton *vita*, Ecgfrith does not ask Æthelthryth directly, but asks her clerical friend, Wilfrid, to persuade her, but before he has a consultation with Wilfrid, he is convinced by Æthelthryth.¹⁹ Æthelthryth preaches

¹⁸ Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, pp. 194-95.

On Osbert’s Letter to Adelidis, see Vera Morton, trans., *Guidance for Women in the Twelfth-Century Convents*, with an interpretative essay by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 21-49.

¹⁹ On the Wilton *vita* (London, British Library, Cotton MS Faustina B. III), see ‘Vita S.

about the significance of virginity and the practice of spiritual marriage to her husband and her friend, emphasising that it is not only for her own virginity but is also beneficial for Ecgfrith himself.

The existence of a clerical figure like Wilfrid is also important to support a wife who wishes to practice spiritual marriage. Female saints' clerical friends play a role in helping holy women pursue their religious faith. In addition to Wilfrid, Æthelthryth is known to have communicated with other clerical friends, such as Cuthbert, to whom she sent her embroidery as a gift.²⁰ Along with a common topos of spiritual friendship between male clerics and female saints, hagiographic or quasi-hagiographic writings about medieval religious women sometimes present a triangular relationship between a female saint, her spiritual friend, and her opponent. In the Wilton *vita* of Æthelthryth, Wilfred is represented as an agent for both Ecgfrith and Æthelthryth. Although Wilfrid is expected to work as a go-between for this couple, his dilemma, forced to choose between his king's demand and his mission to lead a pious woman to a spiritual life, keeps him from doing anything until Ecgfrith gives up Æthelthryth by himself, saying 'Take þou my wyff, syre Wylfride, þis mayde clene, / And professe hur to religiose' (ll. 254-55). The role of Wilfrid in her later life is significant as a bishop who makes her a nun. The *SEL* hagiographer also notes his name: 'In þe yle of Eli none heo bicom / Of þe bischop Wolfrai þat was þo þe abit heo nom' (ll. 21-22).

In terms of her practice of spiritual marriage and her abandonment, a late medieval East Anglian woman, Margery Kempe, is more similar to Æthelthryth than

Etheldredae Eliensis' in *Anglische Legenden*, ed. by C. Horstmann (Heilbronn: Gebr. Henninger, 1881), pp. 282-307.

²⁰ See *Liber Eliensis*, II.29.

to Cecilia, whom Margery apparently follows at first. Margery, who lived in Bishop's Lynne, a port town in East Anglia, never mentions the name of Æthelthryth in her *Book*, but she would most probably have known of Æthelthryth, who established her fame as a local saint in East Anglia. Margery had apparently been to Ely, as the *Book* describes that she attempts to go home to Bishop's Lynn by way of Ely, although she is arrested before she reaches there (Chapter 55). If she had known of the fame of Æthelthryth as a virgin, wife, widow, and abbess saint in their native East Anglia, it is possible that she would have also been aware of similarities between Æthelthryth and herself in their devotion to virginity, attempts to observe the practice of spiritual marriage with their husbands, and their entry to the religious life after their persuasion of their husbands.

As Æthelthryth in the Wilton *vita* is described as 'full stidfast both in hert & pou3t' (l. 206), the hagiographers often present Æthelthryth as a woman with a strong will. However, the *SEL* *vita* does not elaborate on this, as other *vitae* do, but briefly describes her pleas to remain chaste and to become a nun:

Heo bar hire so uaire a3en hire lord & so on him gan crie
 Pat heo was euer clene maide wiþoute sunne of folie.
 So fareþ alle oþer wiues nouþe whose wold here wille drie
 Ac here lords beþ to mucche schrewen ac napeles ic wene i lie.
 On hire lord heo criede uaste 3if heo mi3te come to ende (ll. 13-17).

Æthelthryth in the *SELS* is not as strong as in the other versions, but instead, in this scene she is depicted as being more emotional, indicated by the word 'crien' ('crie' and 'criede'). Although the word means not only actual acts of crying but also, more widely, pleading and petition, it is possible to read this scene as Æthelthryth's emotional plea. By describing her crying, however, the hagiographer emphasises her steadfastness as a wife, by comparing her with 'oþer wiues' who cannot execute

their will. His reference to wives also emphasises Æthelthryth's exceptionality and distinctiveness as a saint; but it is also of note that he compares Æthelthryth with secular wives at the same level. He suggests that if these wives have as strong a will to appeal to their husbands as Æthelthryth, they can accomplish what they wish, such as living chastely with their husbands or apart from them. Perhaps Margery is one of the few examples of secular wives who are not one of the 'oþer wiues' the *SEL* hagiographer mentions. Both Æthelthryth and Margery are the wives who gain freedom from marital obligation in order to live as they wish.

The spiritual marriage between Æthelthryth and Ecgfrith is thus ended, leaving questions about the fulfilment of its practice. The historical, cultural, and political circumstances around her lead her narrative to a different ending. Æthelthryth seems to be a successful example of a medieval woman who follows Cecilia's ideal in the beginning, but, as is the case with the later example of Christina of Markyate, she makes clear the limits of imitating the classical example of Cecilia and her spiritual marriage in medieval England.

Æthelthryth's virginity, preserved from marital intercourse, later plays a crucial role in her translation. She keeps herself incorrupt not only from her earthly husbands but also from the posthumous corruption. Translation of saints' bodies as relics was one of the important rites for the veneration of saints. It served as the ceremonial transfer of saints to newly built shrines for their glorification and commemoration, and also played a ceremonial role in their canonisation.²¹ The narrative of translation, or *translatio*, is one of the sub-genres of hagiography, in

²¹ Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978; revised 1990), pp. 11-12.

addition to the *vita*, *passio*, and miracles.²² Of all the *SEL vitae* of monastic women in medieval Britain, the *vitae* of Æthelthryth and Edburga contain episodes of their translation. Æthelthryth's *translatio* is a more typical narrative of saints' translation, containing miraculous episodes. According to the *SEL vita*, sixteen years after the death of Æthelthryth, her sister, Seaxburh, who becomes an abbess at Ely after Æthelthryth, opens Æthelthryth's tomb to discover that her sister's dead body is as beautiful as when she was alive:

Here bodi heo fond also fair as heo aliue were
 Cler & round & fair inow riȝt as heo slepe þere.
 Also uareþ þis wiues ȝut þat maidnes comeþ to deþe
 And so longe mid here lords beþ as ic wene hi mowe wel eþe.
 Þe schete wherin heo was iwounde as swote was also
 & as white as hi were þo heo was þeron do (ll. 43-48).

The *SEL vita* also mentions a contact relic of Æthelthryth, namely the 'schete', the shroud which wraps her body. As is the case with her body, it remains as it would have been used at the time of her burial. The contact relics are secondary relics, anything other than a saint's body and which 'had themselves come into contact either with a saint during his or her lifetime, or with his body after death', such as oils or even a person who touched part of the saint.²³ In *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede illustrates how Æthelthryth's grace was extended by contact among people – those who touched the linen were released from illness (IV. 19).

Miracles of incorrupt bodies happened to both male and female saints. It is also one of the traditions of Æthelthryth's female descendants, such as Wilhtburh, sister

²² Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 11; Salih, 'Introduction: Saints, Cults, and Lives in Late Medieval England', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Salih, pp. 1-23 (pp. 13-14).

²³ John Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), pp. 16-18 and p. 61.

of Æthelthryth, and Werburga of Chester, grandniece of Æthelthryth, that their bodies were discovered undecayed many years after their deaths. Since many of those saints, as well as Æthelthryth, were virgins, this often demonstrates the saint's bodily purity when they were alive. Osbern Bokenham, who also wrote the *vita* of Æthelthryth in his *Legenda aurea*, describes in *Mappula Anglie*, a topographical writing on England, that the discovery of incorrupt bodies is typical of English saints, quoting from *Polychronicon*:

no-wheere of no peple in oo prouynce be foundyne so many seyntis bodies liynge hool aftur hur dethe, incorupt & hauynge þe similitude & þe exemplary of finalle incorupcioun, as byne in Yngelond; and he exemplifieth by seynt Edward and seynt Edmund kyngis, seynt Alphege & seynt Cutberde bishops. Item at Wecestre in þe Cathedralle-churche besides þe highe-awtere one þe sowthe side þer liethe a bischoppe, called John Constaunce, þe body vncorupte, þe vestimentis in like wise as holle & as soote as my be; and seynt Andree wife twyes queen & maydoun & y dar boldly by auctoryte of experience addyne her-to kyng Edwardis doughtre þe furst aftir þe conquest, Dame Jone of Acris, whos body lithe hool & incorrupt in þe frires queere of Clare one þe sowth side...(p. 11).²⁴

As examples of these saints, Bokenham lists male saints such as Saints Edward the Martyr, Edmund, Alphege, Cuthbert, and a bishop called John Constance, and then mentions women, Æthelthryth and Joan of Acre, a daughter of Edward I and Eleanor of Castile, and a countess of Hertford and Gloucester.²⁵ These passages are similarly found in *Gesta regum Anglorum*, where William of Malmesbury lists virgin saints

²⁴ C. Horstmann, 'Mappula Angliae, von Osbern Bokenham', *Englische Studien*, 10 (1886), 1-34.

²⁵ On Joan of Acre, see Jennifer C. Ward, 'Joan, Countess of Hertford and Gloucester (1272-1307)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Online Edition, January 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14821>> [accessed 2 June 2014]; Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints, and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern Bokenham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 14.

such as Æthelthryth, Edmund, Alphege, and Cuthbert, as well as Werburga (207.4).²⁶ Except for Joan of Acre, who does not seem to have been a virgin, the kings and bishops in the lists of Bokenham and William of Malmesbury are known for their virginity, and their bodies were posthumously discovered undecayed, just as Æthelthryth's incorrupt body symbolises her virginity. The hagiographical topos of the incorrupt body in English accounts was influenced by works from the continent, especially Merovingian Francia, as is seen in the writings of Gregory of Tour.²⁷ Yet, Bokenham's claim that England has a number of incorrupt bodies of saints sheds light on the insularity of the nation, represented as an impermeable, virgin body. Also, their bodies are sanctified on the holy ground of England.

As Wogan-Brown suggests, Æthelthryth is characterised by her insularity.²⁸ The image of insularity connects her virgin body with the Isle of Ely and also with the insular nation of England. As we have seen in the example of Frideswide, the saint's virgin body often represents larger enclosed spaces, such as a monastery and a city, as a synecdoche. While Frideswide represents more artificial and architectural spaces, Æthelthryth's Isle of Ely is imagined more naturally in *Liber Eliensis*.²⁹ This is also true of England, which is often imagined as an enclosed island garden in medieval literature.³⁰ According to Catherine A. M. Clarke, monastic islands such as the Isle

²⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regvm Anglorvm: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

²⁷ David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 50-52; Crook, *English Medieval Shrines*, pp. 61-62.

²⁸ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, pp. 194-95.

²⁹ Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 79-82.

³⁰ Lynn Staley, *The Island Garden: England's Language of Nation from Gildas to Marvell*

of Ely, often represented as a *locus amoenus* (beautiful place), function as ‘metonym or emblem for the island nation’ with ‘polysemous imagery and metaphorical association’.³¹ As Bokenham deliberately connects holy incorrupt bodies with the land of England, Æthelthryth’s virgin body overlaps the insular nation, England.

In the passage telling of Æthelthryth’s posthumous miracles, the *SEL vita* interestingly does not refer to one of the most famous miracles at her translation. Along with the discovery of her incorrupt body and miracles of the shroud, it is discovered that Æthelthryth’s tumour, which caused her death, is healed. According to Bede, Æthelthryth had suffered from tumour around her neck, which Æthelthryth herself attributed to her vanity of wearing necklaces of gold and pearls. Bede quotes her doctor, called Cynefrith, as one of the witnesses of her miracle, saying that he did not find the large tumour she used to have; nor did she have the wound made by his incision at her deathbed to let the pus out (Chapter 19).

Given that the episode of her suffering from a tumour, as Æthelthryth herself states before she dies, tells of her penitence for vanity, the *SEL vita*’s omission of the miracle of the tumour stresses this saint’s purity both physically and spiritually as represented by her virginity. As Bokenham describes Æthelthryth as a precious gem throughout his *vita*, the *SEL* hagiographer enhances an image of a gem further, to that of a pearl. While MS B states that her exhumed body was ‘cler & rody & feyr inow₃’ (f. 280r), giving an image of her healthy, rosy skin, MSS E and V describe her as ‘cler & round & fair’.³² Along with the whiteness of the cloth mentioned four

(Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 1-3.

³¹ Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England*, p. 89.

³² Blanton corrects the MS reading to ‘sound’ rather than ‘round’. See *Signs of Devotion*, p. 246.

lines after this, the roundness of her body evokes an image of pearl. The pearl, compared to her body, is not a symbol of vanity as represented by the accessory which Æthelthryth wore in her youth, but a symbol of virginity, as is praised in the *vita* of Margaret of Antioch or the Middle English poem, *Pearl*.³³ Along with the whiteness of the cloth, the *SEL* hagiographer elevates her virginity by omitting the episode of the necklace/tumour which reminds us of her vanity, and emphasising her unblemished life.

Furthermore, the omission of the episode of the tumour/necklace also presents Æthelthryth's narrative as typical of feminine sanctity. Since abbess saints possess mainly authority and status and their narratives are more or less based on a saintly male model, Bynum's theory of women's stories and symbols does not always apply to the *vitae* of abbess saints. Yet, the *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth, unlike other *vitae*, is suggestive of what Bynum argues as a narrative of feminine sanctity, which is 'less climax, conversion, reintegration and triumph, and the liminality of reversal or elevation, than continuity'.³⁴ Women do not experience a liminal phase when the conversion, inversion, and reversal happen to male saints. Rupture from the secular life, status, and also wealth occurs in this stage. Just as Margery's white dress is a mark of her breach with the secular world, Æthelthryth's tumour and scar, which represent and symbolise her former secular life, serve as a similar mark.³⁵ The lack of these images in the *SEL vita* presents her life as a continuity, typical of feminine

³³ See Ryan trans., *The Golden Legend*, I, pp. 368-70 (p. 368). On *Pearl*, see Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, eds, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: 'Pearl', 'Cleanness', 'Patience', 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007).

³⁴ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 32.

³⁵ On Margery and her symbols, see Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 40-41; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 280-81.

sanctity, by depicting Æthelthryth's body which is not ruptured but whole, without a tumour or scar.

3. A Virgin Abbess: Æthelthryth and Hild of Whitby

Æthelthryth's experience of being a wife, widow, queen, and virgin, certainly benefits her second life as an abbess. The *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth characteristically includes descriptions of her becoming both nun and abbess:

In þe yle of Eli nonne heo bicom
Of þe bischop wolfrai þat was þo þe abit heo nom.
Uor hire þat hous was furst bigonne þis ordre for to make
So þat a gret couent sone heo gan to hire take.
Abbesse heo was hire self imad after þe furst 3ere (ll. 21-25).

Although Æthelthryth is similar to other Anglo-Saxon female saints in the *SELS* who gain their abbatial power from their noble family, Æthelthryth seems to possess further power from her secular marriages and her former status as a queen. The Isle of Ely in which Æthelthryth founds her monastery is formally given to her as a dowry at her first marriage to Tondberht.³⁶ In terms of the foundation of Ely Abbey, her first marriage to Tondberht and her subsequent widowhood importantly enable her to found her own monastery in Ely.

It is also of note that the *SEL* hagiographer mentions her competence as an abbess. As a founder, Æthelthryth is quickly installed as abbess and her abbey flourishes through her guidance. Æthelthryth is one of the holy foundresses in the

³⁶ Alan Thacker, 'Æthelthryth (d. 679)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) in <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8906>> [accessed 14 May 2014].

SELS, as well as Frideswide and Winifred. The passage indicating the success of the abbey is similarly seen in an episode of the foundation of Minster-in-Thanel, initiated by Domne Eafe, who is succeeded by Mildred. She manages her abbey by presenting herself as an example of monastic life, which is described as a ‘clannore life’, consisting of prayers, fasting, and alms-giving – an ideal model for cloistered women (ll. 27-30).

Æthelthryth’s appointment as an abbess is more importantly supported by her experiences in the world, which are often regarded as important for presiding over nunneries. This contrasts with other abbess saints in the *SELS*, who start their monastic lives at an early age without experiences in the secular society including marriage. Unlike them, noble women, especially widows, who had experienced the secular world were preferred as abbesses in the Middle Ages.³⁷ For example, one of the holy abbesses, Saint Hild, presided over the double monastery at Whitby, presumably after being widowed. However, along with practical aspects regarding abbesses’ management abilities in their nunneries, abbesses’ virginity was also considered as an ideal attribute for them to become heads of female monastic communities.³⁸ The representation of Æthelthryth, both as a virgin and a former queen, which coexist without contradicting each other, is a realisation of the ideal of medieval abbesses.

Despite the fact that widowed women were recruited as abbesses in medieval England, all abbesses from the *SELS*, including Æthelthryth, are virgins. Considering this characteristic of the *SEL* abbesses, it seems that the *SELS* prefer virgin saints, most of whom are inexperienced. The *SELS*’s apparent preference for virgin saints

³⁷ Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, pp. 193-94.

³⁸ Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, p. 194.

contrasts with one of the most prominent abbess saints in their contemporary Anglo-Saxon England, Hild of Whitby.

The existence of Hild is not irrelevant to discussions of Æthelthryth, not only because both of them are representative abbess figures in Anglo-Saxon England, but also because they are related each other as aunt and niece. Bokenham's *vita* of Æthelthryth begins with descriptions of Æthelthryth's lineage, particularly on her mother's side. Æthelthryth's father, King Anna, is often emphasised as producing a number of holy women, including Æthelthryth, in other *vitae*. Bokenham, however, describes that Æthelthryth's mother, Herewith, is known as a sister of Hild, the holy abbess:

A wife had accordyng to his degree
Bothe of byrthe and condicions as ful fair wight
And Heriswitha clepid was she
which sustur was to blissid Hilde
An hooly abbesse the story seith thus
whos fadris name was Henricus (fol. 117v).³⁹

Bokenham also refers to Hild's father, Henricus, who is Æthelthryth's grandfather on her mother's side. For their kinship, CUL MS Additional 2064 includes the *vita* of Hild in its collection of the saintly female relatives of Æthelthryth (fol. 89r-97r).

Although the *SELS* contain relatively more abbess saints than contemporary collections of hagiography, there remain questions about their reasons for the omission of certain abbesses, such as Hild. Blanton lists native saints whom the

³⁹ All quotations from Bokenham's *Legenda aurea* are based on my transcription from images of the manuscript, available at The Faculty of Advocates <<http://www.advocates.org.uk/library/specialcollections/abbotsford/LegendaAurea.html>> [accessed 1 July 2014]. Capitalisation and word-division are modernised, and punctuation is editorial. Abbreviations are silently expanded.

SELS might have included, such as abbesses Saints Hild, Eanswyth of Folkestone, Edith of Wilton, and Æthelburh of Barking.⁴⁰ Among them, Hild is the most successful Anglo-Saxon woman who could represent a group of English abbess saints. Various reasons for the exclusion of Hild from the *SELS* can be considered. Because the localities of the *SEL* abbesses are roughly limited to the southern and midlands areas of England, as its title, the '*South*' *English Legendaries*, suggests, did her northern identity cause her exclusion, even though the *SELS* include male saints from northern England, such as Cuthbert, Chad, and Oswald? Or, was it because she was an exceptionally powerful woman who exerted her authority not only in a female community but also in male religious communities as head of a double monastery? Or, was it just because she was not a virgin? The cult of Hild, especially in comparison with that of Æthelthryth, offers a key to these questions.

The cult of Hild was not apparently as widespread as Æthelthryth's. According to Alan Thacker, the cult of Hild was probably local, given that eight of fourteen churches dedicated to her are concentrated in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Also, he argues that she rarely appears in pre-Conquest liturgies, apart from St Alban's Psalter, which depicts Hild along with other Anglo-Saxon women, Æthelthryth and Frideswide.⁴¹ The lack of cult sites, including her shrine, is one argument for her unpopularity at the nationwide level, and is markedly different to Æthelthryth and

⁴⁰ Blanton, 'Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers', pp. 243-44.

⁴¹ Alan Thacker, 'Hild (614-680)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Online Edition, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13255>> [accessed 10 June 2014]. On Hild in liturgical materials, see Christine E. Fell, 'Hild, Abbess of Streonæshalch', in *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Jorgen Højgaard Jørgensen, and Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 77-99 (pp. 90-93). On the depiction of Hild in the St Albans Psalter, see Diane Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works by and for Women in England* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 27.

her cult sites.

Along with the lack of her localised cult, the number of *vitae* of Hild, especially in the vernacular, is small. The reason for the absence of Hild from the *SELS* is not because of deliberate exclusion, but can be attributed to the relative scarcity of textual transmission of the legends of Hild. The intermittent textual history of Hild reveals a long blank period of several centuries between the Old English and Middle English *vitae*, the latter produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Despite the fact that both *vitae* of Æthelthryth and Hild are written by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, they followed a different path in terms of the later transmission of their *vitae*. In comparison to Æthelthryth, a substantial amount of whose *vitae* survive both in Latin and the vernacular throughout the Middle Ages, the unpopularity of Hild is obvious. In Old English, her *vita* is only found in a short passage from the *Old English Martyrology*, which J. E. Cross argues is possibly based on a lost *vita* of Hild.⁴² In Middle English, her *vitae* were not produced until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when a collection featuring a number of East Anglian female saints (CUL MS Additional 2604), the *Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande*, and the early seventeenth-century collection of women saints, *Lives of Women Saints of our Contrie*, were produced.⁴³ These *vitae* are based on a Latin collection of native saints, John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium Angliae* from the fourteenth century, later re-arranged and published as *Nova Legenda Anglie* in the fifteenth and sixteenth

⁴² J. E. Cross, 'A Lost Life of Hilda of Whitby: The Evidence of the *Old English Martyrology*', *Early Middle Ages*, 6 (1979), 21-43. On Hild in the *Old English Martyrology*, see Rauer, ed. and trans, pp. 216-17.

⁴³ See Görlach, ed., *The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande*, p. 113; Horstmann, ed., *The Lives of Women Saints of our Contrie of England, Also Some Other Liues of Holie Women Written by Some of the Auncient Fathers (c. 1610-1615)*, EETS, OS 57 and 59, 2 vols (London: N. Trübner, 1886), I, pp. 56-58.

centuries. Hild also appears in the so-called ‘Romsey Legendary’ (London, British Library, Lansdowne MS 436), which includes Anglo-Saxon and British female saints, owned by Romsey Abbey in the fourteenth century. The relative paucity of Hild’s *vitae* and the lack of nationwide cult activities could suggest that the life of Hild did not attract medieval hagiographers as much as that of Æthelthryth.

While Hild seems to have been less popular among hagiographers, some historical writers have commemorated her existence in their histories. In *Polychronicon*, the name of Hild appears a number of times in a series of male-centred historical narratives. Higden refers to Whitby Abbey, albeit briefly, as well as rendering the name Abbess Hild as ‘abbas of Strenischalt ... þat now hatte Whiteby, and þritty myle of 3ork’ (IV: 16).⁴⁴ Whitby Abbey functioned not only as a place where kings’ daughters were sent, such as King Oswy’s daughter (IV: 16), but also as a place which produced a number of famous bishops. Moreover, there is a long passage on the Synod of Whitby, in which Hild is depicted as involved in clerical discussions on the calculation of Easter (IV: 17). The way in which Hild is depicted in *Polychronicon* is different from that of Æthelthryth. The latter’s life is told with hagiographic episodes of her preservation of virginity and her posthumous performance of miracles in Ely (IV: 16), even though they are only briefly added to the event of Ecgfrith’s marriage to her; Hild, in contrast, is not presented as a hagiographic figure, but it is possible to see Hild as an independent political figure, an abbess who presided over her double monastery, educated monks and nuns, and was part of a historical moment of British Christianity, rather than simply living as a

⁴⁴ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden maonachi Cestrensis; together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Churchill Babington and J. Rawson Lumby (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library, 2006).

daughter and a wife of famous male figures.

While Bede's account of the life of Hild is potentially full of hagiographic topoi, in medieval writings more practical, rather than spiritual, aspects of her achievements as an abbess of Whitby are often stressed. In Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the Life of Hild tells of her conversion, her inclination to Christianity, and her exemplary life at Whitby, as well as her prevision of her own death and a vision seen by a nun after her death. Also, Hild is involved in two miraculous episodes: of her mother, Hereswith, whose dream of a necklace illuminating the whole of Britain is realised by the birth of Hild, and of Cædmon's vision which inspires him to compose a hymn as a father of English poetry (IV: 23-24). Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing have uncovered the significance of Hild, who was long buried in history, by re-reading Bede's narratives of those two miracles associated with her. They argue that Bede's treatment of Hild, especially in the episodes of these dreams, causes her disappearance from later medieval history.⁴⁵ Indeed, these episodes are rarely recounted in later writings in English, except for in the Middle English prose *vita* in CUL MS Additional 2604. Only her Latin *vita*, from *Nova Legenda Anglie*, retains both miracle stories, as well as an episode of her expulsion of serpents from Whitby, which is not found in Bede. The Middle English translation, *The Kalendre of New Legende of England*, which would have been received by a wider audience through Pyson's publication in 1516, is much abbreviated, omitting all these miracles. Hild is, unlike Æthelthryth, not known in association with her miracles, but rather for her political achievements in Middle English.

If an apparent lack of miracles is one of the reasons behind Hild's lack of

⁴⁵ Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 15-29.

popularity in medieval hagiography, what miraculous episodes would she have needed? In a comparison between Hild and Æthelthryth, Æthelthryth has more striking miracle stories related to her virginity. The incorruption of her body needs no mention, but generally, hagiographers tend to see the saint's preservation of virginity itself as a miracle. In a saint's *vita*, the more fiercely defended it is, the more miraculous her virginity becomes. This seems to be one of the reasons why the *SEL vitae* of abbess saints, such as Frideswide, Mildred, and Winifred, illustrate how they preserve their virginity from their male suitors.

Although it is usually argued that Hild was a widow, it is difficult to know from history whether she was actually married or not, and, if she was, to whom she was married. Hild's experience of marriage and possible widowhood is blurred in *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede states that she spent thirty-three years as a noblewoman in the world, and then another thirty-three years as a servant of God. He does not tell us the name of her husband, but, given that Bede emphasises Hild's nobility as a niece of Hereric, nephew of Edwine of Northumbria (IV: 23), it seems unlikely that she did not marry until the age of thirty-three. It is more plausible to consider that she entered a monastery as a widow after her marriage ended.⁴⁶ Christian E. Fell speculates from Bede's silence about her husband that she was married to a pagan king.⁴⁷ Whether or not his silence was intentional, the ambiguity of Hild's marital status later brings confusion. Despite the fact that it is mainly based on Bede's narrative, the *Nova Legenda Anglie* wrongly describes her as virgin, referring to her as 'Sancta Hilda virgine et abbatissa' in the title of her *vita* (p. 29).⁴⁸ The Middle

⁴⁶ Thacker, 'Hild (614-680)'; Fell, 'Hild, Abbess of Streonæshalch', pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷ Fell, 'Hild, Abbess of Streonæshalch', p. 80-81.

⁴⁸ On her *vita*, see 'De sancta Hilda virgine et abbatissa', in Horstmann, ed., '*Nova Legenda*

English translation, the *Kalendre*, also follows its Latin source. Although the opening part of its text, which might have included an account of her earlier life in the world, is lost, the Middle English prose life of Hild in CUL MS Additional 2604 refers to her as ‘holy mayde and abbess’ (f. 90r) and ‘holy mayde and modir abbess’ (f. 89r).⁴⁹ Fell points out that Hild also appears as a virgin in later calendars.⁵⁰ These collections of course contain widowed abbesses, as well as Seaxburg, a sister of Æthelthryth and a queen of Kent, and they by no means had a policy of collecting virgins’ narratives, but it is notable that Hild came back into vernacular hagiography as a virgin after a long absence. Like Margery, Hild, who was possibly married, is remade as a virgin in hagiography, following the example of Æthelthryth. The revival of Hild as a virgin indicates that although virginity is not a requirement for sainthood, it is an important quality to be compiled by hagiographers as a saint. Although Hild never appears in the *SELS*, Hild’s history of disappearance and reappearance in vernacular hagiography, with the transformation of her identity into a virgin, reconfirms the significance of virginity. As is stressed throughout the *vita* of Æthelthryth, the persistence of virginity is dominant in the *SELS*.

4. Canonisation and Saint-Making Activities

One of the most important elements differentiating Æthelthryth from Hild in terms of their reception was the devotional culture nurtured around their cult centres. East Anglia not only produced the cult of Æthelthryth but also created various

Anglie, II, pp. 29-33.

⁴⁹ The quotations from ‘The Life of St Hild of Whitby’ are based on my transcription from CUL MS Additional 2604.

⁵⁰ Fell, ‘Hild, Abbess of Streonæshalch’, pp. 79-80.

devotional cultures, particularly related to women.⁵¹ A number of famous female religious originated in this area, from mystics and visionaries to female saints venerated at a local level.⁵² East Anglia was rich in literary and visual culture commemorating saints beyond the written text, as represented by dramas, stained-glass, wall-paintings, and sculptures. One of the *SEL* manuscripts, T (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 17), is known as the only *SEL* manuscript which contains illustrations of saints.⁵³ The dialectical features show that it originates from Cambridgeshire, and the drawings in MS T are also considered to be devotional art from medieval East Anglia.⁵⁴ Although the manuscript includes neither pictures nor *vitae* of the local abbess saints with whom this thesis is concerned, there are those of universal abbesses, such as Saints Bridget of Ireland and Scholastica, both depicted wearing Benedictine black robes and holding books in their hands, and Scholastica holding beads (fol. 13v and fol. 21r).⁵⁵ As the coexistence of texts and images in this

⁵¹ See Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989); Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, Studies in East Anglian History, 1 (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1993).

⁵² On the veneration of classical female saints in medieval Norwich, see Carole Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 7-10.

⁵³ On MS Tanner 17, see Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 99-100; Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490: II Catalogue and Indexes*, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles, 6, (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1996), pp. 149-50. For further discussions on the drawings of saints in MS Tanner 17, see Karen A. Winstead, 'Visualizing the *SEL*: Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 17', *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 347-80.

⁵⁴ Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *The Early Art of Norfolk: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art Including Items Relevant to Early Drama*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Reference Series, 7 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), p. 328.

⁵⁵ Nichols, *The Early Art of Norfolk*, p. 171 and p. 227; Winstead, 'Visualizing the *SEL*', p. 358.

manuscript illustrates, the *SELS* were, like other saints' legends, received in conjunction with other media, as one of various ways for commemorating the lives of saints.

Along with the veneration of universal saints, there were a number of activities used to celebrate their own saints at the local and popular levels in East Anglia. The activities for commemorating local saints varied widely: building shrines for saints not only to commemorate them but also to attract pilgrims, dedicating churches in the saints' names, and representing saints and their narratives in various media, which included creating written compilations of their *vitae* and miracles in written texts. Through these activities, saints were actually made without official canonisation. As Lewis points out, saint-making activities were 'posthumous cult', grown 'regardless of whether or not they have been canonised'.⁵⁶

The official canonisation of local saints in medieval England was not considered as necessary as cult activities, until the process was institutionalised and applied to English saints. As mentioned in the Introduction, all native women in the *SELS* had already established their fame as saints before the authorisation of papal canonisation in the twelfth century. Therefore, they were canonised through the process of popular and local canonisation, as Vauchez argues, including the various saint-making activities mentioned above.⁵⁷

Whether official or local, there was increasing interest in saints in late medieval England. In discussions of canonisation and saint-making, especially in East Anglia, Margery Kempe is often referred to as a good example. Margery was neither canonised, culted, nor regarded as a saint in the medieval period, but she is often

⁵⁶ Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Late Medieval England', p. 199, n.14.

⁵⁷ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 141-44.

discussed by modern scholars as having had the desire to become a saint. Lewis, in her discussions of the making of Margery Kempe as a saint in the late medieval English context, argues that the *Book of Margery Kempe* can be situated in the context of cults of saints and saint making in late medieval England by examining the *Book's* various attempts to present Margery as a saint.⁵⁸ In the *Book*, which can also be read as an auto-hagiography of Margery, she is presented as a quasi-saintly figure, and both Margery and her biographers are apparently conscious of her canonisation. The *Book* attempts to identify herself with them, through frequent references to female saints, especially virgin martyrs such as Katherine, Margaret, and Barbara, as well as a penitent sinner, Mary Magdalene.⁵⁹ In her vision, Jesus tells her that she will join saints in heaven and be worshiped for her love of God (Chapter 22). One of the yeomen of the Duke of Bedford she meets in Yorkshire asks her to pray for him 'yf euer þu be seint in Heuyn' (Chapter 53; ll. 4347-48).⁶⁰ Margery's interest in canonisation is also pointed out through her encounter with Church councils on the continent on her pilgrimage, where the canonisation of Bridget of Sweden and her *discretio spirituum* are actively discussed.⁶¹ Against this

⁵⁸ Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Late Medieval England', p. 199.

⁵⁹ On the references to female saints in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, see Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 186-201; Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Veneration of Virgin Martyrs in Margery Kempe's Meditation: Influence of the Sarum Liturgy and Hagiography', in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Denis Renevey and Christiana Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 177-95; Kukita Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literatures, Liturgy and Iconography* (Aberystwyth: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 94-104.

⁶⁰ See also Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Late Medieval England', p. 195 and pp. 201-02.

⁶¹ Kukita Yoshikawa, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*: The Issue of *Discretio Spirituum* Reconsidered', *English Studies*, 92.2 (2011), 119-37.

background of saint-making activities on the local level and wider, international discussions on canonisation on the continent, it is clear that late medieval England, including East Anglia, certainly expressed a growing interest in making their own saints, as witnessed by an East Anglian woman, Margery.

Although the *Book of Margery Kempe* does not refer to any local female saints, as Margery's interest is more directed at universal virgin martyrs and confessors of late antiquity rather than medieval nuns, by the time of her religious vocation the cult of Æthelthryth was well established in East Anglia. As noted above, Æthelthryth's cult did not require papal authorisation at that time; there were, instead, various local activities at work to make her a saint, as is revealed by Blanton not only from written texts but also from various elements of material culture which commemorate her.⁶² The shrine of Æthelthryth was expanded, as was her cult itself, through her translation, which was carried out three times: first by Seaxburg, sixteen years after her death; second, to a new Norman church in 1107; and third, in 1252, on the occasion of the dedication of Ely Cathedral to Æthelthryth as well as to Peter and Mary.⁶³ Æthelwold, who conducted the translation of a number of saints as part of his monastic reform in England, was also involved in the second translation of Æthelthryth.⁶⁴ Along with Ely Cathedral, there are twelve churches dedicated to Æthelthryth in medieval England, including Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, and Somerset.⁶⁵ Her miracles, as well as *vitae*,

⁶² See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 295-306; Virginia Blanton-Whetsell, 'Imagines Ætheldredae: Mapping Hagiographic Representations of Abbatial Power and Religious Patronage', *Studies in Iconography*, 23 (2002), 55-107.

⁶³ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ *Liber Eliensis*, II. 52; Crook, *English Medieval Shrines*, pp. 89-90.

⁶⁵ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 306. See also Frances Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church*

are documented in collections of miracles, such as Ælfhelm's *Liber miraculorum beate virginis*, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin's *Miracles of Æthelthryth*, Gregory of Ely's *Life and Miracles of Æthelthryth*, and are also incorporated into *Liber Eliensis*.⁶⁶ The fame of Æthelthryth was thus not limited to Ely or East Anglia, but eventually spread outside her original sphere of veneration.

Æthelthryth also contributed to the flourishing cults of local saints in East Anglia. It is known that Æthelthryth's female relatives were likewise celebrated as saints: her sisters, Seaxburh and Wihtburh; Seaxburh's daughters and Æthelthryth's nieces, Eormenhild and Eorcengota; and Eormenhild's daughter and Æthelthryth's grandniece, Werburga of Chester.⁶⁷ The cults of Æthelthryth's female relatives were not apparently as widespread as Æthelthryth's, with the exception of Werburga, who was later venerated as a patron saint of Chester after her translation, but it suggests one of the aspects of local saint-making, through veneration throughout the whole kinship network of this particular saint. Moreover, some of Æthelthryth's saintly sisters and their daughters were reunited at the shrine of Æthelthryth in Ely for further veneration. Seaxburh, and her daughter, Eormenhild, succeeded to the position of abbess of Ely, and were buried on the same site of Æthelthryth's shrine in Ely.⁶⁸ Later, the body of Wihtburg, another sister of Æthelthryth and Seaxburh, was

Dedications, or England's Patron Saints, 3 vols (London: Skeffington & Son, 1899), III, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Simon Keynes, 'Ely Abbey 672-1109', in *A History of Ely Cathedral*, ed. by Peter Meadows and Nigel Ramsay (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), pp. 3-58 (pp. 4-5); on Goscelin's *Miracles*, see Rosalind C. Love, ed. and trans., *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 96-131.

⁶⁷ On Æthelthryth's hereditary sainthood, see Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, trans. by Éva Pálmai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 86-89.

⁶⁸ *Liber Eliensis*, I. 35-36.

stolen from Dereham in order to join the three abbesses at the same site of Ely, at the suggestion of Æthelwold.⁶⁹ While Æthelthryth's first translation is well documented in various *vitae*, her second translation, conducted together with the translation of Seaxburg, Eormenhild, and Wihthburg, by Richard, the abbot of Ely, also strongly promoted the cult of her saintly relatives.⁷⁰ The shrine in Ely was designed not only for commemorating the life and miracles of Æthelthryth, but also for representing a history of the abbesses in Ely and their holy kinship.

The shrines of Æthelthryth and her sisters at Ely were demolished, and their relics in the shrines there are apparently lost. Yet, as is often the case with other saints, Æthelthryth's body was also fragmented and distributed to several places: Glastonbury, St Albans, Salisbury, Thetford, Waltham, Durham, and London.⁷¹ St Etheldreda's Church in Ely Place, London, has owned the allegedly incorrupt hand of Æthelthryth in a reliquary box on the altar since it was translated in the nineteenth century.⁷² Given that Ely Place was originally built as an exclave of Ely, Æthelthryth's protection as a local saint, as represented by her fragmented body, survives in such a distant place as London.

Although hagiography is one of the various media for venerating saints, it also plays an important role in producing both saints' cults and saints themselves. Æthelthryth's saintly relatives are included in collections of saints' legends such as Goscelin's Latin *vitae* and the fifteenth-century collection of saints' legends in

⁶⁹ *Liber Eliensis*, II. 53; Crook, *English Medieval Shrines*, pp. 89-90.

⁷⁰ See *Liber Eliensis*, II. 144-48.

⁷¹ See Thacker, 'Æthelthryth (d. 679)', *Oxford DNB*.

⁷² Crook, *English Medieval Shrines*, p. 157.

Middle English prose (CUL MS Additional 2604).⁷³ The compilation of hagiography may also have a similar function as canonisation. A saint would have been given canonical authority through the process of translation from Latin sources, just as they were elevated as saints through the translation of their body by being transferred into their shrines. Like their body placed in shrines, they are also consecrated as saints within the texts.

5. From a Regional to a National Saint

As detailed in the twelfth-century Latin work, *Liber Eliensis*, the legend of Æthelthryth originally contained more geographic information about various regions in England, as it illustrates her birth as a daughter of King Anna of East Angles, her first marriage to Tondberht, ealdorman or prince of South Gyrwe in Middle Angles, her second marriage to Ecgfrith, King of Northumbria, her consecration as a nun in Coldingham, and her foundation of the monastery in Ely. Her departure for Northumberland for her second marriage and her return to Ely after the divorce have particularly significant meaning in terms of her local veneration. While at her first marriage, Æthelthryth is given to a local ealdorman, a close neighbour where she originates from, the second time she has to leave for the North, far away from her familiar country, to marry a son of a king of Northumberland. Æthelthryth eventually sets out on the long journey back to her home town in order to run away from her husband who attempts to get her back. The theme of the abbess's flight from her pursuer with her nuns bears striking similarities with the *vita* of Frideswide. As is the

⁷³ On the Goscelin's *vitae* of female saints in Ely, see Love, ed. and trans, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*.

case with Frideswide, the saint's triumphal return home strengthens the local affection for their saint all the more because she once left their country and has come back after a long absence.

In spite of such a wide geographical spread of her life, there are few references to places in the *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth. As Olsen argues above, the *SEL vitae* of Anglo-Saxon saints contain less historical and geographic information than their Latin sources and contemporary vernacular lives. The *vita* of Æthelthryth emphasises her origin in Ely and East Anglia in this nationwide collection of saints, apparently omitting any other geographic information originally related to her. The hagiographer refers to the kingdoms of her father and her first husband in East Anglia and its neighbouring Mercia, but ambiguously: the king of East Anglia is described as 'king of Engeland of al þat est ende' (l. 2). Tondberht is a 'prince of þe souþ half', which means South Gyrwe. The *SEL* hagiographer might not have been interested in listing the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms himself; or he may have thought that it would not be necessary to provide these details for his post-Conquest audience. While he treats this local information ambiguously, the hagiographer also omits Æthelthryth's Northumbrian connections: Ecgfrith is described only as 'anoþer king of Engelande', and the *vita* mentions neither her flight from the North to Ely nor her consecration at Coldingham. In terms of Æthelthryth's ordination, the *SEL* hagiographer does not state that she takes the veil at Coldingham under Abbess Æbba, as is explained by Bede, but instead describes that 'in þe yle of Eli nonne heo bicom' (l. 21). Even though this information is wrong, 'Eli' is the only place name stated clearly in the *SEL vita*. It is again mentioned at the very end of the *vita*: the hagiographer concludes the text by referring to her feast held in Ely to commemorate her life and translation ('Of hire me makeþ in Eli gret feste azer

iwis'; l. 49). According to Blanton, this is not only the *SEL* hagiographer's original addition, but also the earliest reference to the festival in Ely on Æthelthryth's feast day, held on 23 June. The *SEL* hagiographer might have known about this local fair, and added this new information for his audience who would probably not have known about it.⁷⁴

The *SEL vita* focuses on Æthelthryth's life in East Anglia, especially in Ely, by not including events which happened beyond the East Anglian district, or which were associated with other places outside the target area. At the same time, however, apart from a reference to a local festival in Ely at the end of the text, the *SEL* does not provide any further detailed information about Ely either. The limited space available to the poet could be one of the reasons, but it is one of the techniques in the *SELS*, used for the compilation of 'English' local saints. A similar technique is employed in the *vita* of Winifred: in her *vita*, Winifred's original identity as a Welsh saint is never revealed, nor is her new identity as a patron saint of Shrewsbury. The representation of Winifred in the *SEL* contains more complex issues involving crossing the border between the two nations. Yet, while Winifred is presented solely as an English saint, not as a saint of either Wales, Gwytherin, or Shrewsbury, Æthelthryth's connections with Ely are deliberately emphasised.

The inclusion of Æthelthryth in the *SELS* might not be explained by her locality. In other words, Æthelthryth could have been included neither because of the *SEL* hagiographer's local familiarity with this saint nor because of his intended audience's local interest in her. For example, Edburga is compiled in the *SELS* apparently for her local cult. She was translated to Pershore in Worcestershire which gives us one of the most important reasons why the *SEL* hagiographer selected this

⁷⁴ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 242.

minor saint for his Worcester-centred hagiographic collection, who does not otherwise appear in any other Middle English *vita* than the *SELS*.⁷⁵ Given that the provenance of the three manuscripts containing the *vita* of Æthelthryth is not particularly associated with East Anglia, Æthelthryth is included more likely for her wide-spread recognition as a saint of Ely. The *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth not only emphasise her locality, but also generalises her as a saint of Ely.

The way in which the *SELS* present Æthelthryth as a regional saint in her *vita* as well as in the whole collection becomes clearer by comparing the presentation with other contemporary hagiographic collections in Middle English which contain *vita*e of Æthelthryth: first, the fifteenth-century manuscript, CUL MS Additional 2604, and second, Osbern Bokenham's *Legenda aurea*, in Abbotsford Library, Merlose.⁷⁶ While the former collection was apparently produced for its local connection with East Anglia, the latter has more in common with the E branch manuscripts of the *SELS* in terms of its contents. In contrast to the depiction of Æthelthryth in the *SEL vita*, the fifteenth-century manuscript CUL MS Additional 2604 characteristically shows its interest in local and female saints. Of all twenty-one saints, seventeen saints are female both from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Eleven of the women are from the British Isles and seven of them, namely Æthelthryth, Seaxburh, Eormenhild, Werburga, Eorcengota, Wihtburh, and Hild, are related to Æthelthryth

⁷⁵ Laurel Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester: A Study of her Cult, a.d. 950-1500, with an Edition of the Fourteenth-Century Middle English and Latin Lives', *Mediaeval Studies*, 33 (1971), 292-333 (p. 292).

⁷⁶ Although the significance of these works has attracted critical interest, neither text has been made available as an edited text yet, but they are in preparation. Veronica O'Mara and Blanton are preparing a critical edition of CUL Additional 2604, and Simon Horobin is preparing a critical edition of Bokenham's *Legenda aurea* from EETS. Olsen edited the legends of Æthelthryth and Edith from CUL Additional 2604 in her unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Questions of Identity', pp. 210-17.

and have close connection with East Anglia.⁷⁷ Also, while the *SEL vita* omits her flight narrative, CUL MS Additional 2604, following *Liber Eliensis* and *Nova Legenda Anglie*, contains topographic descriptions related to Æthelthryth's miracles on her journey from Coldingham to Ely: the miraculous appearance of a well and the miraculous growth of green vegetation from her staff. Although both miracles are typical hagiographic motifs found in other *vitae*, such as Frideswide (well) and Kenelm (sprouting staff), it is of note that the *vita* describes that these miracles occur in places that later become important cult sites of Æthelthryth. With regard to her well, the hagiographer does not specify the site, called 'Seynt Awdryes well' (p. 212), but the place where Æthelthryth takes a rest after crossing over River Humber, and where her staff shows a sign of divine grace, is specified as 'Awdre-is Stow', as it is later called, which means 'Æthelthryth's resting place'.⁷⁸ In this place, Stowe Green, which is located in Lincolnshire today, the hagiographer states that a fair chapel, called Ætheldreðestowe, later Stow St Mary's, was built for venerating the saint (pp. 212-13).⁷⁹ These topographic descriptions serve to show that the saint is venerated in various places as a local saint, but not collectively as a national saint. The *vita* of Æthelthryth in the Cambridge collection thus consciously maps her cult places by containing these details.

Bokenham's *Legenda aurea* contains more than 170 saints, male and female, universal and local, ranging from classical martyrs to its contemporary medieval

⁷⁷ St Æthelburh is incorporated into the *vita* of Eorcengota. Veronica O'Mara and Virginia Blanton, 'Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 2604: Repackaging Female Saints' Lives for the Fifteenth-Century English Nun', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 13 (2010), 237-47; and Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 259-63.

⁷⁸ All quotations from the Legend of Æthelthryth in CUL Additional 2604 are from Olsen's edition in 'Questions of Identity', pp. 210-17.

⁷⁹ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 306.

monastics, which makes it comparable with the E branch manuscripts of the *SELS* in its contents. There are more than twice the number of native saints and native female saints in the E branch manuscripts of the *SELS*, yet Bokenham's purpose in compiling a collection of saints, including English saints, is similar to that of the *SELS*, through his addition to native saints and his positive attitudes towards writing about female saints, both English and universal.

Along with his famous *Legends of Holy Women*, a collection of thirteen universal female saints, written at the request of his female patrons, Bokenham himself states that he compiled 'Legenda aurea' which includes English saints. According to the prologue of his *Mappula Angliae*, he made an 'Englische boke' which includes 'seynt Cedde, seynt Felix, seynt Edward, seynt Oswalde and many other seyntis of Englund, mencyoune made of divers partis, plagis, regnis & contreis of this lande Englonde' (p. 6). As Bokenham himself describes, the Abbotsford *Legenda aurea* indeed contains Anglo-Saxon, post-Conquest, and British saints, such as Wulfstan, Gilbert, David, Cedde, Felix, John of Beverly, Dunstan, Aldhelm, Botolph, Alban, Æthelthryth, Wilfred, and Winifred.⁸⁰ As well as these English saints, Bokenham also writes the *vitae* of universal saints whose fame was particularly known in late medieval England.

Since the early nineteenth century, when the manuscript was purchased by Sir Walter Scott, its existence at Abbotsford Library had been forgotten until 2005 when Simon Horobin identified the manuscript as Bokenham's other collection of saints' legends which had long been considered lost.⁸¹ Until the re-discovery of this

⁸⁰ Horobin, 'Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Work of Osbern Bokenham', *Speculum*, 82 (2007), 932-49 (p. 932 and p. 935).

⁸¹ Horobin 'The Angle of Oblivion', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 November, 2005,

manuscript, there were discussions over the identification of Bokenham's lost 'Englische boke'. *Gilte Legende* had been argued over as a possible candidate, but its original manuscripts do not contain the English saints listed in *Mappula Angliae*. Later manuscripts of *Gilte Legende* add some supplementary English saints, but since those later additions are not considered to have been made by the same author as the original, these discussions over the identification of Bokenham's 'Legenda aurea' never reached consensus.⁸²

Before the existence of the Abbotsford *Legenda aurea* became known, Sheila Delany, in discussions on Bokenham's *Legends of Holy Women*, lists female saints whose *vitae* Bokenham may have written but whom he did not choose for his *Legends of Holy Women* when considering his monastic and local identities. First, there are Monica and Scholastica as relatives of two great monastic figures, Augustine and Benedict. Second, there are Petronilla and Barbara for their local cult in East Anglia. Petronilla's relics, especially her skull, are claimed to have been held at Bury St Edmunds, and Barbara is one of the most popular female saints along with Cecilia and Faith, often appearing in East Anglian rood screens.⁸³ Delany's assumption is indeed correct – although the *vitae* do not include particular local information, of all of these universal female saints Bokenham did write the *vitae* of Scholastica, Petronilla, and Barbara in his *Legenda aurea*. Their inclusion also suggests that the local cult of saint, both universal and local, may have influenced Bokenham's selection of saints in the *Legenda aurea*.

Bokenham was apparently interested in presenting one of the East Anglian local

12-13.

⁸² See Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, p. 23, n.9.

⁸³ Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, p. 38.

saints, Æthelthryth, as a national saint of England in his *Legenda aurea*. Bokenham's Abbotsford *Legenda aurea* had East Anglian connections because of its original ownership at Clare Priory where he was a friar. Horobin argues that Bokenham's *Legenda aurea* was primarily intended for an East Anglian audience, especially patrons and supporters gathered around Richard of York (who was himself a patron of Clare Priory), such as his wife Cecily Neville and his sister Isabel Bouchier.⁸⁴ From detailed information provided in the Legend of Æthelthryth, Horobin also points out Bokenham's local familiarity with this saint.⁸⁵

By using his knowledge, Bokenham also illustrates the transition of Æthelthryth from a regional to a national saint. Compared to the *SEL vita*, this is a longer text of the life of Æthelthryth, consisting of about 600 lines. The text is conscious of its intended readers, as it frequently addresses the audience. The hagiographer is also conscious of himself as a poet. His style may be similar to the *SEL* hagiographer, as Bokenham often inserts his own comments, sometimes digressively and praises the life of Æthelthryth. Yet Bokenham more willingly presents his saint's locality as well as her nationality, partly because of his familiarity with the saint as an East Anglian local. Unlike the *SEL vita*, which omits her location and incorrectly states Æthelthryth's association with the North, Bokenham emphasises her fame in Northumberland where she was a queen and a nun:

The bright bemys therof shyne so clere
that fer rounde aboute the bemys is sprad.
And not oonly Northumbirlonde is made glad
but thurghoute al Ingelond in length and brede
the fame therof did sprynge and sprede (fol. 118v).

⁸⁴ Horobin, 'Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Work of Osbern Bokenham', pp. 942-43.

⁸⁵ Horobin, 'Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Work of Osbern Bokenham', pp. 939-40.

Similarly, after her death, Bokenham describes that her fame as a miracle worker spread outside Ely:

Right so this gemme hir bright bemys
widespred abroad in many a cuntree
of myraclis werkyng by grete plentee
ffor which moche peple came hir to seke
in place where she lay lowly and meke (fol. 119v).

In both passages, Bokenham compares Æthelthryth's fame as 'bright bemys' cast all over England. The spread of the saint's fame as being like light is reminiscent of a dream of Hild's mother in which her necklace, signifying the unborn Hild, sheds light on England.⁸⁶ Bokenham also consciously describes the spread of her cult outside Ely, by mentioning 'anothir cuntree' (fol. 118v) or 'abrode in many a cuntree' in 'length and brede' of England. The process of how Æthelthryth becomes a national saint of England from a local saint venerated in Northumberland and Ely is explicitly illustrated in Bokenham's *vita* in a way different to the *SEL*'s method.

In terms of Æthelthryth, Bokenham was not apparently satisfied with incorporating her *vita* into the *Legenda aurea*. In *Mappula Angliae*, he again refers to this saint. As he states in the prologue that 'for þe more clerere vndirstandyng of the seid thyngis and othur' (p. 6) on 'seyntis of Englonde, menciyoun made of dyuers partis, plagis, regnis & contreis of this lande Englonde' (p. 6), *Mappula Angliae* is primarily written as a supplementary text for his *Legenda aurea*, especially for conveying a better understanding of English saints. This also suggests how important it was for Bokenham to write about England and English people in his writings. As quoted above, in Chapter 5, titled 'Off the grete merveillous wondurs of this land' (p.

⁸⁶ See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 23.

9), he lists saints' incorrupt bodies, including those of the East Anglian local Æthelthryth and Joan of Acre. The latter, Joan, was known to Bokenham as a famous local woman, as she was buried at Clare Priory where Bokenham was a friar.⁸⁷ The addition of Joan, as well as the reference to Æthelthryth, reflects Bokenham's own familiarity with them as a local. Yet, by listing these local saints as 'the grete merveillous wondurs of this land' (p. 9), he elevates them to become representatives of the miraculous people in England.

To sum up the characteristics of these collections, CUL MS Additional 2604 shows a strongly local nature, as its collection of saints suggests. While it states that Æthelthryth was venerated locally in other regions than Ely, the collection's interest does not go much beyond the local cult of this saint, and Æthelthryth's national identity is not foregrounded. By contrast, Bokenham's *Legenda aurea* is more inclined to present saints as national saints who represent various regions. Bokenham willingly illustrates Æthelthryth as a national saint who has various regional backgrounds by providing detailed information on her cult. On the other hand, although the *SELS* are similarly interested in compiling the *vitae* of English saints, the *SEL vita*'s depiction of Æthelthryth as a national saint is not as explicit as Bokenham's; rather, it generalises the saint of Ely by obscuring her other localities.

As we have seen in the cult of Æthelthryth, hagiography is one of the numerous media of a saint's cult, producing saints themselves and promoting their fame. In the case of Æthelthryth, miracles related to her virginity play as a central role in her cult. Married twice, first to a local and then to a national authority figure, Æthelthryth

⁸⁷ Her miraculous exhumation was witnessed by Augustin friars at the Priory and is also described by Bokenham's contemporary, John Capgrave, in his *Chronicle*. See Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, p. 14.

refuses to engage in any sexual intercourse; nor does she intend to produce heirs, because of her devotion to virginity. Æthelthryth's hard-fought virginity later plays a crucial role at her translation, when she is miraculously discovered as incorrupt a long time after her death. Æthelthryth's virginity is also important in her female abbacy, as is suggested by the comparison with her contemporary, the holy abbess Hild, who was most probably not a virgin but was revived as such in late medieval hagiography. Hagiography, one of media for canonisation and saint-making, also significantly canonised the texts of saints by documenting such holy miracles. The local saints, textually canonised, were sometimes elevated to national saints, depending on the nature of larger hagiographic collections. As a comparative study of the two Middle English hagiography collections suggests, each has its own way of presenting and representing Æthelthryth. While Bokenham most explicitly illustrates the process by which an East Anglian Æthelthryth was gradually recognised as a national saint, representing England from the viewpoint of an East Anglian local, the *SEL vita* is more inclined to present her as a regional saint of Ely. In the *SELS*, she plays an important part in mapping the nation, which consists of various localities represented by regional saints.

Chapter 3

Saint Mildred of Minster-in-Thanel and Female Relationships within the Cloisters

1. Introduction

The *SEL vita* of Saint Mildred, the seventh-century abbess of Minster-in-Thanel, provides many insights into female monastic relationships. Focus on a female same-sex community in the *vita* of Mildred shed significant light on an invisible aspect of medieval monastic women. It is often argued that relationships between women, although they were not wholly absent, are rarely depicted in medieval literature. Even within a nunnery, as Barbara Newman argues, sisterhood is less visible than brotherhood, which was a central theme in the twelfth century.¹ If they appear at all, Karma Lochrie points out, we see more of the anxieties about female friendships, such as women's habit of gossiping, or the implications of female same-sex desires.² It is evident that, when compared to that between men, or between a man and a woman, an ideal of female spiritual fellowship is not a fully theorised concept.³ In hagiography, the legends of virgin martyrs often depict virgin saints as solitary female protagonists. The *vitae* of medieval nuns and abbesses,

¹ Newman, 'Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century', *Traditio*, 45 (1989-1990), 111-146 (p. 131).

² Lochrie, 'Between Women', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 70-86 (pp. 71-74 and pp. 77-84). On the example of possible homosexuality in medieval nunneries, see Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 26-46.

³ Lochrie, 'Between Women', pp. 74-77.

which are mostly staged within the cloisters, are supposed to focus more on relationships between women than the virgin martyr legends, but in the *SEL vitae* of monastic women, even though their excellence as nuns and abbesses is repeatedly emphasised, the relationships between them and their sister nuns and abbesses are hardly seen. The picture of female communities depicted in the *vita* of Mildred is therefore important, since it provides the *vitae* of female saints, especially monastic women, with a common context within which their lives are founded. Also, an ideal of female abbacy, exemplified by three examples of good and bad abbesses, is of help for reading the *vitae* of other abbesses in the *SELS*, by offering a theorised concept of medieval abbesses.

This chapter explores various forms of female relationships constructed in female monastic communities and represented in the *SEL vita* of Mildred. Mildred is characteristic, like Æthelthryth, for having been documented in Old English and Latin in the Anglo-Saxon period. In Latin there are a number of texts, grouped by the ‘Kentish Royal Legend’, which tell the life of Mildred, such as Goscelin’s eleventh-century *Vita Deo delectae virginis Mildrethae*, hagiographic texts of other Kentish saints, and the genealogy of the Kentish royal family.⁴ In Old English, although the main part of the life of Mildred is lost in both manuscripts, *S. Mildryð* (London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A.xiv) only contains the first part of the *vita*, Domne Eafe’s foundation episode; and the Lambeth Fragment (London, Lambeth Palace, MS 427) begins with posthumous miracles of Mildred.⁵ These precedent texts, especially those from the Kentish Royal Legend, are concerned with

⁴ See Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 105-43.

⁵ Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, pp. 29-31; pp. 85-87.

writing the kinship and genealogy of kings and saints in the Kentish and East Anglian royal families, with focus on Mildred as a central figure.⁶

The *SEL vita* also deals with the theme of Mildred's kinship, but it is more focused on elaborating various issues of female monastic relationships, whether natal or spiritual, woven by the three women: Mildred, Domne Eafe, and a nameless abbess of Chelles. The *SEL vita* characteristically presents two contrasting images of female communities, as represented by Mildred's good mother abbess, Domne Eafe, and a nameless evil abbess of Chelles. Focusing on the idea of female kinship, I first argue that the *SEL vita* depicts the relationship between Domne Eafe and Mildred as an ideal realisation of biological and spiritual kinship. As the quotation from the psalms, 'Audi filia', symbolically implies, the monastery of Thanet represents an exemplary community of religious women. Also, the *vita* of Mildred is clearly distinct from other *SEL vitae* of monastic women for having an evil female figure as opposed to the saint and her mother. This anti-heroine, the abbess of Chelles, is another subject for scrutiny in this chapter, as she serves as an important counterpart of good English mother/virgin abbesses, Domne Eafe and Mildred. On the one hand, since the *SEL* hagiographer's intention to present the dichotomies between the two women and the two countries is evident, such a representation of a foreign woman reveals the *SELS*'s possible xenophobia combined with their misogyny. On the other hand, the *SEL vita* also deals with the concerns and anxieties which medieval English nunneries would have had, but situates these contemporary issues in a French convent over the sea. Domne Eafe and this evil abbess of Chelles thus do not only embody good and bad abbesshood, but also reflect on the ideal and the reality of female monastic communities in late medieval England.

⁶ Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, pp. 42-44.

2. Female Saintly Kinship

As the *SEL vita* of Mildred introduces her as ‘þe holi maide of kinges kunne’ (l. 1), her nobility and saintly kinship are important throughout the *vita*. The *vita* of Mildred begins with a long description of the genealogy of Mildred, starting with Mildred’s great-great-grandfather, Æthelberht, and her great-grandfather, Eadbald, particularly focusing on their conversion into Christianity: Æthelberht was baptised by Augustine; and Eadbald by Archbishop Laurence after the archbishop’s vision. Then, the hagiographer refers to Eadbald’s grandchildren, one of whom is Domne Eafe, mother of Mildred. Shifting his focus onto female kinship, the hagiographer mentions that Domne Eafe has three daughters, Milburga, Mildgith, and Mildred. All three are celebrated as saints:

Pis Domneue iwedded was þat Merwald and heiȝ man
þe kinges sone of þe March þat het King Pandan
Preo douȝtren heo hedde bi him þe on was Seint Mildride
Seint Milborw þat oþer was þe þridde Seint Mildriþe.
Me þinkeþ þer was a god barntem þeiȝ þer were to vewe
Ac betere beþ a vewe gode þan a gret hep of schrewe (ll. 29-34).

Here, the saint’s genealogy and holy kinship are noticeably feminised. As the *SEL* hagiographer continues that ‘Seint Milborw in þe March brouȝte hire lif to fine / And ȝet heo liþ at Wenlac vaire in noble schrine’ (ll. 35-36), one of Mildred’s sisters, Milburga, was also an abbess and later venerated as a saint. Milburga presided over the abbey of Much Wenlock, and her patronage as a holy defender of the town is celebrated not only in Much Wenlock but also in its neighbouring Welsh

borderlands, especially after her posthumous translation.⁷ Also, her *vitae* are compiled in Latin hagiographic collections, such as the Romsey Legendary and *Nova Legenda Anglie*, as well as in the *Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande* in Middle English.⁸ It is also of note that Milburga becomes an abbess of Much Wenlock, via the authority of their father, who founded an abbey for her in his kingdom, while Mildred succeeded to the abbey founded by their mother after their parents' marriage dissolved.⁹ Milburga also highlights the relationship between Mildred and her mother: when the parents' authority is split between the two daughters, Mildred succeeds to the position and inherits the possessions of the maternal side.

Given that Anglo-Saxon royal female saints are often defined by their male family members as daughters of the king, as typified by the beginning of the *vita* of Edburga which devotes much space to describing her male genealogy, Mildred's identity is characteristically established by her female kinship. Moreover, the hagiographer's reference to 'a god barntem' indicates an idea of saintly kinship: a saint's holiness is inherited from their family. Saintly kinship is an important notion, especially in the cult of royal and dynastic saints in medieval Europe. *Beata stirps*, literally meaning 'blessed stock', would produce a number of saints from a certain royal family or dynasty, suggesting that saintliness is hereditary and transmissible

⁷ See A. J. M. Edwards, 'An Early Twelfth Century Account of the Translation of St. Milburga of Much Wenlock', pp. 134-51.

⁸ See Horstmann, ed., '*Nova Legenda Anglie*', pp. 188-92; Görlach, ed., *The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande*, p. 139.

⁹ John Blair, 'Mildburg (*d.* in or after 716)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18693>> [accessed 6 March 2015].

over generations.¹⁰ The most typical example is the cult of the Biblical family, especially the cult of Saint Anne, mother of the Virgin, but it is commonly observed in the cults of royal and dynastic saints throughout the Middle Ages.¹¹ The thirteenth-century saint Hedwig of Silesia, Elizabeth of Hungary's maternal aunt, is praised for her holy kinship in her *vita*, which compares her holy lineage to an organic image of a plant, with a quotation from Romans 11:16: 'if the root be holy, so are the branches' (Romans 11:16).¹² The *vita* of Mildred suggests that the holiness of the kinship in her family is particularly associated with her female relatives, just as with Æthelthryth and her female descendants. As described in the *SEL vita*, having her mother as her root and her sisters as her branches, Mildred's holy identity is supported by her female kinship, both her vertical (mother-daughter) and horizontal (sisters) saintly relationships.

While saintly kinship regards one's earthly family as a significant source of holiness, from which a saint's sanctity is derived, there was also an existing ideal of renunciation of the world in hagiography. The topos is often found in early legends of hermits and virgin martyrs who abandon their earthly family in order to pursue the Christian faith. Gábor Klaniczay points out this paradox in his research on ruler saints in medieval central Europe, stating that early saints in late antiquity are usually presented as the polar opposite of secular rulers.¹³ The same holds true for classical

¹⁰ Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, p. 121; Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 177-83. See also Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe*, trans. by Susan Singerman, and ed. by Karen Margolis (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 79-94.

¹¹ Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, p. 227; Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 180.

¹² Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, p. 220.

¹³ Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, p. 396.

female saints, especially virgin martyrs. Rejecting not only male authorities but their original noble family, they are often depicted as solitary, such as Magaret and Juliana. While the legends of these solitary saints were widely read in the Middle Ages, royal sainthood gained popularity in central Europe and Anglo-Saxon England. The *SEL vitae* of Anglo-Saxon female saints also suggest an aspect of the paradoxical situation in which Anglo-Saxon holy nuns were placed. Since most Anglo-Saxon female saints in the *SELS* were so-called 'royal saints', their status as nuns and abbesses was hugely supported by their secular royal families, who founded their abbeys for them and supported them to preside over their religious communities. Yet, at the same time, as religious, they were also required to renounce the world, including their authority, power, and status derived from their secular family outside the cloisters.

As saintly kinship and royal sainthood presented a dramatic shift from late antique sanctity, there was a need to solve the paradox of royal sainthood. The hagiographers often reconciled the fact of noble women's status and power with the monastic ideal of renunciation of the world by inserting episodes of their retirement and humble life. The saints' practice of humility is one of the motifs in the legends of royal saints. The *SEL vita* of Edburga deals with the same issue of royal sainthood, and presents a well-balanced picture of Edburga: while the first half of her narrative emphasises her noble lineage, descended from Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder, the second half of the *vita* focuses on episodes of her humble behaviour in her nunnery, which would not have deserved her royal status. In the case of Mildred, although her virtue of humility is not related in episodes such as the saint's voluntarily asceticism or lowly labours, the *vita* depicts her renouncing her earthly family in order to undertake spiritual training: she 'vorsak hire lond & al hire kun' (l.

65) and departs for France, where she suffers numerous tribulations. The *vita* focuses on trials of her faith and perseverance in an unfamiliar land, illustrating how she is treated in an unworthy manner in a French convent. The renunciation of her land and her kin shapes Mildred as a royal saint who retains both her noble lineage and saintly virtue without them contradicting each other.

Mildred's mother, Domne Eafe, is significant in the *vita* of Mildred, not just as a founder of the abbey of Minster-in-Thamet, which is later inherited by Mildred, but for her excellence as a mother abbess, which contributes to shaping Mildred's sanctity. The legends of Mildred, both in Latin and Old English, often include a miraculous episode of Domne Eafe's foundation of the monastery before the life of Mildred begins. The foundation story is an important narrative telling the historical legitimacy of a monastery. It often explains how its founder came to possess the land for the monastery. Possession of land meant possession of power in Anglo-Saxon England. This was particularly true of Anglo-Saxon royal founder-abbesses, such as Hild and Æthelthryth, since the land secured not only the space for building their abbeys but also their power and authority as abbesses. Domne Eafe was also one of those powerful women with land, but unlike Æthelthryth, who inherited the land for her monastery from her former marriage, Domne Eafe acquired the land in compensation for the murder of her brothers in a unique way. When she is offered it by her cousin, King Egbert, she does not decide by herself, but lets her animal companion choose. Following the Latin tradition, the *SEL vita* depicts how she acquires the Isle of Thanet in the symbolic episode of her tame hind:

He bed hire anon lond inouȝ in a wal fair place
Ne kepte nouȝt þis wommon chese bote þorwe oure Lordes grace.
Wiþ hire heo hedde a tame hinde þat was simple inow
þat siwede hire aboute in ech place & aȝen kunde drow.

Heo bed þis best aboute wende & schewe Godes miȝte
 & mete out how muche lond oure Lord hire wolde diȝte.
 In þe yle of Teneth þis best abouten eode
 & envoweled as muche place as hire ledi hedde to nede.
 Þe lengþe of eiȝte & fourti teme wiþoute ech mannes rede
 In þe lenge heo mat euene out & oþer such in brede.
 To hire ledi heo wende aȝen þo heo hedde do þis dede
 Þe meres were wel sone iset as þis lond scholde sprede... (ll. 39-50).

Stephanie Hollis points out the folkloric nature of this foundation episode in the Latin version, including the appearance of the animal, the king's rash promise and God's punishment.¹⁴ The episode, in which Domne Eafe acquires more land than the king expects, can be read as a variation of the folkloric motif of the 'rash promise'.¹⁵ Although the *SEL vita* does not include it, in the Latin and Old English *vitae* it is followed by the episode of Thunor, the king's councillor, who attempts to interrupt the contract between the king and Domne Eafe and is swallowed into the earth which opens wide because of his contemptuous attitude towards her proposal to use her hind.¹⁶

This episode suggests another female relationship, central to this *vita*, which is between Domne Eafe and her animal companion. As Susan Crane argues, miracles involving animals have more implications than simple 'folklore fantasy', which is commonly found in hagiography and therefore tends to be dismissed as such.¹⁷ The hind, which has passed down today to be a symbol of Minster-in-Thamet, certainly

¹⁴ Hollis, 'The Minster-in-Thamet Foundation Story', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 27 (1998), 41-64 (pp. 50-52).

¹⁵ Hollis, 'The Minster-in-Thamet Foundation Story', pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ Hollis, 'The Minster-in-Thamet Foundation Story', p. 49; Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 5.

makes this foundation story mythical. In hagiography, animals often appear as saints' holy companions.¹⁸ The legends of holy hermits and anchorites depict how male saints establish their relationships with their animals through mutual hospitality. The *vitae* of female saints do not deal with contact with any animals more frequently than male saints, but there are similar episodes that tell of holy women's domestication of wild animals, such as Saint Edith.¹⁹ Domne Eafe's hind, which is 'tame' (l. 41) and follows her everywhere, is certainly her animal companion or pet, and the episode is based on the hagiographic topos of intercommunication between saints and their animal followers. In the medieval tradition of bestiaries, a stag (*cervus*), including hinds and calves, is a symbol of a good Christian, since it was believed to have a habit of eating snakes, symbolic of devils.²⁰ Animals such as harts and stags often appear in the story of the hermit and hunter, in which the saint helps those wild beasts escape from hunters.²¹ The most famous example of a stag in a saint's legend is the one that Saint Eustance encounters during a hunt, and through which the saint converts to Christianity. Domne Eafe's hind is described as 'simple' (l. 41), denoting the hind's blameless innocence, humility, and meekness as Christian virtues rather than her ignorance as an animal. Moreover, it should be noted that her animal is gendered as female, not referred to as a deer or a hart. In the *vita*, the hind is first

¹⁸ On studies on saints and animals, see David Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 11-70; Dominic Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages*, pp. 52-56 and pp. 85-112.

²⁰ Crane, *Animal Encounters*, pp. 80-90. See also the Second-Family Bestiary, Chapter 16 on stag, in Willene B. Clark, ed. and trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 134-36.

²¹ Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages*, pp. 118-22.

referred to as 'his best' and then consistently as 'heo' and 'hire', and the gendering of this animal stands out throughout the passage. Regarding female deer, medieval bestiary texts also states that they are caring mothers who keep calves from danger until they are fully grown and then teach them how to run and leap across precipices.²² The examples of saints who are fed by the milk of does in forests, such as Saint Giles and the Irish saint Cainnech, might have come from medieval belief in this characteristic of a female deer as a good mother. This idea of a hind as a caring mother who trains her children clearly overlaps with that of Domne Eafe who nurtures and educates Mildred with care as a natal mother.²³ Furthermore, the hind in Domne Eafe's foundation story did not necessarily have to be gendered, that is, it suggests that it is intended to represent another example of a female relationship beyond species, between Domne Eafe and her animal companion. Saints' Edenic relationships with animals are also seen as an ideal of spiritual leadership which is exerted not only in human society but also in the realm of nature.²⁴ For example, the *vita* of Cuthbert tells of an episode of Cuthbert's visit to the sea and to sea animals ('oteres', l. 91) at night, symbolising that the saint has devout followers outside his monastic community who gather around the saint on the shore, licking and warming his feet.²⁵ On the one hand, the reciprocity between Domne Eafe and the hind is built more on trust rather than the bond between an animal and its owner, as Domne

²² Clark, ed. and trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 135.

²³ On does who feed saints, see Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages*, p. 75 and 118.

²⁴ Crane, *Animal Encounters*, pp. 28-38; Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages*, p. 46.

²⁵ See 'The Life of Cuthbert', ll. 85-96 in D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, pp. 118-21; ll. 85-96 in Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SELS'*, pp. 359-62. See also Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages*, p. 46; Crane, *Animal Encounters*, pp. 26-27.

Eafe entrusts her hind with an important decision, and her hind answers Domne Eafe's demand to delineate the land, 'as hire ledi hedde to nede' (l. 46). On the other hand, given that Domne Eafe is described as 'hire ledi' (l. 46; l. 49) from a viewpoint of the hind, and that their cross-species relationship is founded on their gender, Domne Eafe's relationship with her hind also suggests her strong quality as a female superior, foreshadowing her success as head of a female monastic community. Like various other motifs in the *vita* of Mildred, the animal is also feminised in order to show one of the various pictures of female relationships.

As is clear from the inclusion of Domne Eafe's symbolic foundation episode in the *vita* of Mildred, Domne Eafe is important not only as a natal mother to Mildred but, even more so, as a spiritual mother who presides over nuns, including Mildred, in her abbey. The close relationship between Mildred and Domne Eafe is seen in the episode in which the young Mildred is first educated by her mother. As is the case with Edburga, Mildred is educated by her abbess in the nunnery:

Seint Mildride hire douȝter sone heo vette ner
 & seide hire of profecie þe wordes of þe sauter.
 Herneke douȝter & iseo & abuy þin ere þer to {¶Audi filia &c}
 & vorȝet al volk of þi cuppe & þi vader hous also.
 Leve douȝter þus þe rat David þe profete... (ll. 55-58).

Mildred first learns the psalms, just as Frideswide does. The *vita* of Frideswide depicts how she is acquainted with the psalms at a very young age. Although Frideswide's miraculous mastery of all the Latin psalms in six months is most likely a hagiographic topos, a saint's prodigy story, both episodes of Mildred and Frideswide indicate the female saints' familiarity with the Psalter, including the psalms. There are also examples of the infant Virgin in the N-Town Mary Play

reciting fifteen psalms in Latin along with her exposition;²⁶ and of Elizabeth of Hungary, who pretends to read the Psalter, even though she is too young to understand how to read.²⁷ These episodes demonstrate how holy women receive a religious education from their tutor and then are given holy excellence by God. Psalms serve as an important tool to show these saintly gifts.

The scene in which Domne Eafe tells Mildred to listen to ‘þe wordes of þe sauter’ (l. 56) is highly reminiscent of the most famous Biblical mother and daughter, Saint Anne and the Virgin, especially of the iconography of Anne teaching the young Virgin how to read by using the psalms. The image of Anne teaching the young Mary originated in English Dominican communities and became widely popular in fourteenth-century England.²⁸ One of the examples containing this image is the fourteenth-century East Anglian altar piece, called Thornham Parva Retable, now in the Musée de Cluny, Paris. It depicts Anne, standing behind the young Mary and teaching her how to read. We see that textbook Anne uses is the psalms, as the opened book shows a passage beginning from ‘Audi filia et vide’ (45:11), which is exactly the same passage Mildred reads in her mother’s nunnery.²⁹

²⁶ See ‘The Presentation of Mary in the Temple’, ll. 102-61, in Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8*, 2 vols, EETS, SS 11 and 12, I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²⁷ See ‘The Legend of Elizabeth of Hungary’ in *Gilte Legende*, l. 20, in Hamer with Russell, eds, *Gilte Legende*, II, pp. 842-54; Bokenham’s Legend of Elizabeth of Hungary, ll. 9577-79, in *Legendys of Hooly Woummen by Osbern Bokenham, edited from MS Arundel 327*, ed. by Mary S. Serjeantson, EETS, OS 206 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 259-89; see also for translation, Delany, trans., *A Legend of Holy Women: Osbern Bokenham, ‘Legends of Holy Women’* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 177-95.

²⁸ David Park, ‘Form and Content’, in Christopher Norton, David Park, and Paul Binski, *Dominican Painting in East Anglia: The Thornham Parva Retable and the Musée de Cluny Frontal* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1987), pp. 33-56 (pp. 51-53).

²⁹ Park, ‘Form and Content’, p. 50.

This passage, ‘Audi filia’, had particular significance for female religious. The psalms were, of course, read by monks whose devotional life consisted of reading them throughout the year.³⁰ Yet this particular passage telling of the spiritual marriage between God and a virgin, is quoted elsewhere in devotional literature written for women. For example, *Hali Meiðhad* begins by drawing the attention of his virgin readers:

Avdi, filia, et uide, et inclina aurem tuam; et obliuiscere populum tuum et domum patris tus. Dauīð þe psalmwruhte spekeð i þe Sawter towart Godes spuse – þet is, each meiden þet haueð meið þeawes – ant seið, ‘Iher me, dohter, bihald ant bei þin eare; andt forȝet ti folc ant tines feader hus’ (1: 1-5).³¹

As the original psalm telling a virgin is chosen as a bride of God is often cited as referring to Christ’s Incarnation, the quotation in the *vita* of Mildred suggests that Mildred is a virgin chosen by God.³²

One of the scribes of the *SEL vita* of Mildred added an annotation on the Latin psalms to the manuscript. Throughout MS E, Latin texts are incorporated into the main English texts. The *vita* of Mildred is annotated five times by the same scribe, such as ‘Amor militis’ (f. 177r) in the scene of the French lover-knight who makes a marriage proposal to Mildred, and ‘Fit abba’ (f. 177v) when Mildred is made an

³⁰ On the plan for reading the psalms, for example, see *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, Chapter 18, in *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. and trans. by Justin McCann (London: Burns Oates, 1952). All references to *The Rule of Saint Benedict* are based on this edition.

³¹ ‘David the psalmist speaks in the Psalter to God’s spouse - that is, to every maiden who has maidenly virtues - and says, “Hear me, daughter, behold and bend your ear; and forget your people and your father’s house”’.

Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, trans., *Anchoritic Spirituality: ‘Ancrene Wisse’ and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist, 1991), p. 225.

³² Park, ‘Form and Content’, p. 50.

abbess in Minster-in-Thanel. These quotations are not found in any other manuscripts, including the *vita* of Mildred, than MS E. Of the five Latin annotations, the scribe quotes from Latin psalms: first at the aforementioned scene of her education (f. 176v); and then at the scene of the torture in the oven, David's prayer to God, 'Igne me examinasti' ('thou has tried me by fire; 16:3) (f. 177r). These Latin quotations in the manuscript suggests that the psalms served as a subtext of the *vita* of Mildred.

Just as in MS E, Mildred's life is annotated with psalms. When she is shut in a heated oven by her evil abbess in France, the hagiographer depicts her singing psalms in the oven:

þerinne heo herde þis maide þo singe murie inow.
 Of þe sauter heo song þis þorw fuir þu fondest me {¶Igne me
 examinasti}
 Ac þer nis on me ifounde noȝt þat euel be (ll. 94-96).

After a series of tortures, when Mildred writes a letter in order to appeal to her mother about her plight, she again uses a Psalter in order to ask her mother for help. The Latin *vitae* contain the details that Mildred sends her mother a Psalter book which contains the letter and a lock of her hair as a proof of her predicament in France, although Mildred in the *SEL vita* only sends her tresses with her letter (XIII).³³ Sending a Psalter book is not simply for disguising Mildred's secret request for rescue, considering the custom in medieval nunneries that all letters from and to nuns are read by the abbess first, but the Psalter book, which is also an object that reminds her of memories of their intimate relationship in England, serves as her

³³ For example, see Goscelin's *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae*, XIII, ed. by Rollason in *The Mildrith Legend*, pp. 108-43.

effigy, animated by her hair.³⁴ Various references to the psalms evoke an episode of Mildred's first learning with Domne Eafe in a nunnery. The psalms importantly signify spiritual kinship between Mildred and Domne Eafe.

Spiritual kinship is another kinship structure on which medieval nunneries were based. Even though they were founded initially through biological kinship ties, royal nunneries comprised a sisterhood between nuns, with an abbess as their spiritual mother. Æthelthryth is often taken as an example of such spiritual kinship, whose *vitae*, such as the Anglo-Norman *Vie* and the collection of CUL Additional 2604, most emphatically show the genealogy of holy abbesses descending from this virgin saint.³⁵ Mildred is also part of the complex web of East Anglian and Kentish royal families, as she is mentioned in *Liber Eliensis* as a distant relative of Seaxburh (a sister of Æthelthryth of Ely) through Seaxburh's marriage to Eorcenberht of Kent (I. 17).³⁶ While spiritual kinship in this sense covers a wider generation of holy abbesses, focus on the relationship between Mildred and Domne Eafe/the evil abbess of Chelles raises a question about female relationships within the nunnery, especially between abbess and nuns, who are not tied by blood but by faith, thereby forming a

³⁴ On the monastic rules on letters, see Chapter 54 of the Middle English Rule of St Benedict in both prose and verse versions, in Ernest A. Kock, ed., *Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet and Two Contemporary Rituals for the Ordination of Nuns*, EETS, OS 120 (London: Trübner, 1902); for the Middle English rules for Franciscan nuns, see *The Rewle of Sustris Menouresses Enclosid*, ed. by Walter W. Seton in *A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book and Two Fifteenth-Century Franciscan Rules*, ed. by R. W. Chambers and Seton, EETS, OS 148 (London: Trübner, 1914), p. 96.

³⁵ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, pp. 210-12; Camp, *Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England*, pp. 65-75 and pp. 91-101.

³⁶ On the importance of Seaxburh in her Kentish family, See Blanton, 'The Kentish Queen as Omnium Mater: Goscelin of Saint-Bertin's Lections and the Emergence of the Cult of Saint Seaxburh', in *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 191-213.

quasi-family.

In medieval nunneries, maternity and motherhood in a secular sense was not of course encouraged for any religious women, including maidens, wives, and widows, all of whom made a vow of celibacy, but was rather replaced by symbolic and spiritual motherhood.³⁷ It is, however, difficult to find a concept of spiritual motherhood relating to an abbess. Felice Lifshitz argues that, derived from the etymology of *abbatissa*, the expected role of an abbess was to become a female father rather than a mother. In other words, an abbess was an honorary father in a female monastic community.³⁸ Both Newman and Lochrie use as an important medieval source for their discussions on this matter Abelard's letters to Heloise, especially the Sixth and Seventh Letters, which are concerned with instructions for an abbess who presides over a community of religious women, and provide many insights into women's monastic lives.³⁹ Although Abelard describes the qualities required for an abbess, such as chastity, sobriety, faithfulness, intelligence, and humility, and states that an abbess 'should do everything alongside her flock' (p. 193), he places more emphasis on the practical aspects of female abbacy, such as the roles and tasks expected for an abbess in everyday life rather than her spiritual roles.⁴⁰ This is also seen in Abelard's preference for the word 'deaconess' instead of

³⁷ Wogan Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, p. 197; Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 99.

³⁸ Lifshitz, 'Is Mother Superior?: Towards a History of Feminine *Amtscharisma*', in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. by John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 117-38 (p. 122).

³⁹ Newman, 'Flaws in the Golden Bowl', pp. 111-113; Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies*, pp. 26-46.

⁴⁰ Quotations are taken from William Levitan, trans., *Abelard and Heloise: The Letters and Other Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007).

‘abbess’, as, he explains, ‘those we now call abbess were once called deaconesses, that is, ministers rather than mothers’ (p. 145).⁴¹ In monastic rules for nuns, for example, the fifteenth-century *Rule of Saint Benedict*, translated into Middle English verse, begins by describing various responsibilities of the abbess in the nunnery. As is the case with Abelard’s letter, it emphasises the abbess’s role as a herdsman (Chapter II). Such monastic rules for nuns commonly refer to the abbess’s love and care for her nuns, but these qualities are not limited to female authorities, and thus they are not presented as gender-specific, mother-like virtues.

However, as Lifshitz argues, there were exceptions, including the examples of early Anglo-Saxon abbesses such as Leoba and Tetta, whose spiritual maternity was praised by writers including Bede, Boniface, and Rudolf.⁴² One of the most representative examples is Hild of Whitby. As an abbess of a double monastery, her spiritual motherhood was well known. Hild attracted many people not only from her female monastic community but also from outside the cloister, because of her care of them; as Bede describes, ‘all who knew Hild ... used to call her mother’ (IV. 23). Even though it is difficult to find a theory of an abbess’s spiritual motherhood, these examples suggest that such qualities were practiced by Anglo-Saxon female saints. Also, while Benedictine rules for nuns do not overtly emphasise the abbess’s spiritual motherhood or maternity, Nancy Bradley Warren demonstrates that Brigittine and Franciscan nunneries projected maternal images such as the Virgin Mary as an ideal of female authority in their communities.⁴³ Although the quality of

⁴¹ See also Levitan, trans., *Abelard and Heloise*, p. 185 and n. 49.

⁴² Lifshitz, ‘Is Mother Superior?’, p. 128; Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, pp. 92-96. See also

⁴³ Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 9-11.

spiritual mother does not always require that the abbesses have the marital or social status of mother before their consecration, the *SEL* abbesses are all virgins and their maidenhood is especially highlighted. Spiritual motherhood is thus better projected through the representation of Domne Eafe, the saint's mother, for example, than through the saint herself, or any other virgin abbess saint in the *SELS*. Within the context of medieval monastic culture, in which spiritual kinship is regarded as more important than natal family, it is noteworthy that the *vita* of Mildred depicts a close relationship between mother and her biological daughter. Yet, more importantly, Domne Eafe's kinship is depicted as an ideal realisation in both natal and spiritual senses.

In contrast to Domne Eafe's spiritual kinship, the monastery of Chelles presents a negative example of a nunnery in which the abbess prioritises biological kinship outside her nunnery over spiritual kinship within it. Although the *SEL vita* omits details of this abbess of Chelles, the Latin *vitae* describe that the lover-knight who triggers all the tribulation imposed on Mildred is actually a relative of the abbess of Chelles.⁴⁴ The abbess bypasses the will of her spiritual sister and daughter, Mildred, in favour of her male relative outside the cloister, and attempts to marry Mildred off to him for her secular vainglory. A reason that Mildred's renunciation of her family monastery does not work successfully also lies in the monastery of Chelles in which the abbess fails to establish spiritual kinship with Mildred.

The *vita* of Mildred ends with the deaths of Domne Eafe and Mildred. Although it is stated that Mildred dies long after Domne Eafe, the ending with the successive deaths of this mother and daughter, rather than with Mildred's posthumous miracle episodes, as in the Latin and Old English versions, again underlines their

⁴⁴ Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, p. 11.

relationships, both as a mother and a daughter and as the founder-abbess and her successor.⁴⁵ When Mildred is rescued by her mother's messenger and brought back to England, the scene in which Mildred is reunited with her mother is depicted as full of joy:

Po heo to hire moder com þer was ioie inow
Vor ioie here eiþer wep & ofte here eiþer low (ll. 137-38).

The *SEL vita* of Mildred can be read as a story of a mother and daughter, both in the natal and spiritual sense, from their union, through separation, to their reunion.

3. The Other Woman beyond the Sea

The image of Domne Eafe as a good mother abbess is further enhanced by the contrasting image of an evil abbess in the monastery of Chelles where Mildred is sent to be educated. The scene depicting Mildred's tribulation is highly reminiscent of the classical virgin martyrs, although it also contains some divergence from the trope. At the same time, anxieties which late medieval English nunneries might have had are found elsewhere in this episode. The *SEL* hagiographer transforms events likely to have happened in medieval nunneries into a hagiographic narrative with central focus on the evil representation of the abbess of Chelles.

Trials for saintly English nuns are often brought about by the violation of their enclosure. The episode in which Mildred is nearly martyred by the violence of the abbess of Chelles begins with a marriage proposal from a knight outside the cloister. Just as Frideswide, whose nunnery is intruded upon by the devil, Mildred's enclosed

⁴⁵ Acker, 'Saint Mildred in the *SEL*', p. 141.

virginal life is disturbed by the intervention of an unwanted suitor. While Frideswide's seducer is a non-human, Christ-like figure whose disguise is fashioned by the devil, Mildred's is more realistic for its medieval nunnery setting, a human knight who asks her to marry him:

Per biside was a kniȝt mon of gret power {¶Amor militis}
Pis maide he louede peramours & hopede come hire ner (ll. 71-72).

The suitor knight's visit to Mildred is seen as a probable event in a medieval nunnery: first, it could happen to a medieval nun, and second, it could particularly happen to a royal daughter such as Mildred. While the *vita* of Frideswide depict the devil as a remarkable intruder who breaks into the architectural enclosure of her nunnery, the *vita* of Mildred suggests another aspect of female monastic enclosure, especially in terms of people's, including the nuns' own, entry into and exit from nunneries, through the figure of her suitor from the outside world. The enclosures which regulate nuns' leaving and outsiders' coming are respectively called active and passive enclosures.⁴⁶ In the *vita* of Mildred, the failure of the passive enclosure, namely the knight's visit and the existence of the abbess as a go-between, eventually leads Mildred to break the active enclosure by herself: her running away from the monastery of Chelles. The monastery of Chelles is represented as the most permeable enclosure.

Although the monastic enclosure in theory was impermeable, there was a certain degree of allowance for nuns and abbesses to contact the outside world in their everyday life. Male clerics often visited nunneries to give mass and conduct other

⁴⁶ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Strict Active Enclosure and its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100), in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women, I*, ed. by John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 51-86; Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 136-37.

business, and lay people, including men and women, could become involved in nuns' everyday life. Nuns could leave their nunneries, with permission, to visit their natal family and friends, go on pilgrimage, recuperate from their own illness, or go on convent business.⁴⁷ Yet, as is often feared in writings for cloistered women, unnecessary contact with the outer world sometimes caused monastic women to corrupt themselves, especially by having illicit relationship with men outside their nunneries and eventually running away from their community. There are examples of nuns who had 'amores in claustro', or sexual relationships with men both inside and outside their community, including the example of the Nun of Watton, discussed later in this section, whose relationship with a lay brother was revealed by her pregnancy.⁴⁸ Of the various reasons for apostasy, abduction, elopement, and pregnancy were most frequent causes of nuns and abbesses leaving their nunneries.⁴⁹ The corruption of nuns caused by temptation by outsiders is what medieval authors feared the most. Writings for religious women, therefore, present a more strict view of female monastic enclosure. The lover-knight in the *vita* of Mildred does not seem to actually meet Mildred, but 'hopede come hire ner' (l. 72) and somehow shows his passion ('is need al how it was', l. 73) to Mildred 'in priuete' (l. 73). In the case of Mildred, the involvement of the abbess of Chelles, who encourages her to receive the knight's proposal, is also characteristic, since she acts like a go-between who passes Mildred from the cloister to the outer world. Mildred, as is the case with Frideswide,

⁴⁷ Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 361-85; Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 141-42.

⁴⁸ Paul Gerhard Schmidt, 'Amor in claustro', in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. by Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 182-92.

⁴⁹ F. Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England, c. 1240-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83-96. For the list of apostate nuns, see also pp. 256-67.

is never tempted by her unwelcome visitor, but it is possible that the *vita* deals with the most common and realistic temptation that could happen to medieval nuns in the cloister.

Although it would not have been permitted for nuns who had already taken the veil, a marriage proposal from a noble knight was most likely to have happened to young princesses like Mildred, who were not yet consecrated as nuns but who were staying at a nunnery school for their education. There are examples of noble women who were educated in nunneries as children and then married off to secular rulers. Matilda, queen of England and a consort to Henry I in the eleventh century, was educated by her aunt, who was a nun in Romsey and Wilton. Although she did not take a veil, her marriage to Henry I was seen with a suspicious eye because of the assumption that she was a nun or runaway nun.⁵⁰ Mildred's suitor is described as a 'mon of gret power' (l. 71), and, considering Mildred's desirability – noble, young, beautiful, but yet not consecrated or married – it is not unlikely that she would have attracted and even received a marriage proposal from the knight. Yet, despite its likelihood, the *vita* of Mildred rewrites this event as a hagiographic motif of trials confronting virgin saints with a strong faith in becoming a bride of Christ. The *vita* does not judge the knight as either good or bad (and perhaps the representation of him as an 'amor militis' (l. 71) does not give the audience a negative impression); instead, the narrator aims his attack at the abbess of Chelles only.

Mildred's experience in Chelles is transformed into a saint's legend with various hagiographic topoi. The beginning of this episode is a romance-like narrative, in

⁵⁰ Lois L. Huneycutt, 'Matilda (1080–1118)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18336>> [accessed 3 June 2015].

which a knight falls in love with his lady by hearing about her reputation:

So god & queinte & vair heo was & of portire so hende
Pat hire los wel wide sprong about in eche ende (ll. 69-70).

It is also similar to a virgin martyr legend, such as Juliana's, which initially begins with the man's falling in love with a virgin saint and courting her to be his wife, rather than making direct sexual threats. In the *SEL vita* Mildred declines his offer without any strong self-assertion or criticism, yet this leads her into further predicaments. The *vita* of Mildred deviates from the narrative pattern of the virgin martyr legends, when the lover-knight, rejected by Mildred, asks for help from the abbess. At this point, the abbess's evil nature is not disclosed in the *SEL vita*, although the knight promises her a gift as a bribe. The abbess first apparently tries to change Mildred's mind by words ('þe abbesse dude þo al hire miȝte heo made hire word wel touȝt.', l. 79), with her abbess-like love and power ('Boþe mid loue and mid eiȝe', l. 80), but the *SEL* narrator promptly judges her, inserting the comment: 'How þinkeþow was þis a god maister me þinkeþ heo was a schrewe' (l. 81). The abbess, who fails to persuade Mildred in this way, eventually transforms herself into a brutal tormentor who burns and beats Mildred. The *SEL* narrator's view of this evil abbess of Chelles is overtly critical: he calls her a 'schrewe' (l. 81) and a 'luper abbesse' (l. 87), and frequently calls his readers attention to her: 'A wonder abbesse þis was on whose riȝt ȝeme toke / Alle abbesse worþe hire worst eni god hous to loke' (ll. 109-10).

One of the most striking elements in the scene of torture in the *vita* of Mildred is both its resemblance to the classical virgin martyr legends and yet remarkable differences from them. A secular man's courting of a holy virgin and his violence against her are typical of the classical virgin martyr tropes, and also of some of the

medieval abbess legends, such as those of Winifred and Frideswide. Yet the intervention of an evil female, authoritative figure as a tormentor of a female virgin saint is unusual. Mills, who analyses the scene of violence in the *SEL vita* of Mildred, points out that evil female characters are commonly seen in the legends of Anglo-Saxon saints in the *SELS*, such as the stepmother who kills Edward the Elder, and Kenelm's evil sister, who entrusts her servant with the murder of the saint.⁵¹ Kenelm's sister shares similarities with Mildred's evil abbess, not only in their malevolence, but also in the fact that they are abbesses. Although her evil as a murderer of the young king saint appears in later hagiographic tradition, Cwenthryth, a daughter of Cenwulf, king of the Mercians, inherited her father's property after his death and took the position of the abbess in Winchcombe and, two centuries after Mildred's abbacy, became an abbess of Minster-in-Thamet in the ninth century.⁵² Considering these examples of evil women in the *SELS*, however, as Mills argues, the example of the abbess who actually commits physical violence against the saint is unique.⁵³

Even though there is a striking anomaly in terms of the gender of the torturer, the violence the abbess directs at Mildred – the burning and beating – is reminiscent of the scenes of the torture of martyr saints. In the Latin *vita*, Goscelin compares

⁵¹ Mills, 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', p. 99.

⁵² S. E. Kelly, 'Cwenthryth (fl. 811–c.827)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54441>> [accessed 20 May 2015]. See also Love, *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives: 'Vita S. Birini', 'Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi' and 'Vita S. Rumwoldi'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 54-55, n. 1.

On 'The Life of Kenelm', see Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 345-55, and D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 279-90.

⁵³ Mills, 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', p. 99.

Mildred to a classical virgin martyr, Lucy.⁵⁴ First, the abbess is, just like Kenelm's evil sister, repeatedly referred to as 'luper' in the *SEL vita*, the word often used for describing the evil judges and tormentors in the legends of classical martyrs.⁵⁵ Then she throws Mildred into a heated oven. The *SEL* narrator somewhat comically describes that the abbess shuts Mildred into the oven 'as me bakeþe a kake / Me þinketh þer was a swete lof to oure Lordes bord ibake' (ll. 89-90). Following the convention of virgin martyr narratives, in which the virginity of female saints saves them from various trials, Mildred is also saved because of her virginity, as the narrator states 'As clear & as vaire sitte vpriȝt as hire noþing nere. / Clene a þing is maidenhood þat no fuir ne mai brenne / Whoso wuste hit al hire lif & wiþ hire bere hit henne' (ll. 100-02). As the hagiographer suggests, 'as me bakeþe a kake', the methods of torturing saints, as if cooking them through boiling, deep-frying, and barbecuing, are typical of the account of classical martyr saints.⁵⁶

The use of an oven as a torture device is also seen in legends of early martyrs. Rosalind Love suggests that Mildred's torture in an oven in Goscelin's Latin *vita* comes from a Biblical episode of three boys in a Babylonian furnace.⁵⁷ Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago, who refuse to worship idols, are cast into a burning furnace by King Nebuchodonosor, but survive with their hair and clothes unburnt (Daniel 3). The topos of the oven in which saints are locked, but in which they remain unhurt, is

⁵⁴ *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae*, C, in Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*. See also, Rosalind Love, "'Torture Me, Rend Me, Burn Me, Kill Me!': Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Depiction of Female Sanctity', in *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Szarmach, pp. 274-306 (p. 278).

⁵⁵ Mills, 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', p. 88

⁵⁶ Mills, 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', pp. 89-90.

⁵⁷ Love, 'Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Depiction of Female Sanctity', p. 283.

also seen in the examples of female saints, such as Hope and Charity (sisters of Faith) and Christina Mirabilis.⁵⁸ Although it is not through torture but as a form of self-mutilation, Christina Mirabilis habitually casts herself into ovens and furnaces to suffer from the fire, but comes out unburnt and unhurt.⁵⁹ Moreover, it is also possible to see the feminisation of Mildred's torture in an oven, as well as her gendered tormentor. At the level of metaphor, the oven is compared to a womb as a symbol of birth and rebirth. Mills argues that its womb-like place, which also produces food ('A swete lof to Lordes bord'), also implies the transfiguration of the human body into the Eucharist.⁶⁰ Also, an oven is a domestic instrument which can be found in households, including nunneries. As the narrator states that 'In an house al fer vram men þis maide heo lek alone' (l. 83), this most probably takes place in a bakehouse, located separately from the main building, sometimes with a brewhouse, on the same site of the nunnery.⁶¹ Since this violence happens in the private space of a bakehouse in the nunnery, Mildred's torture is nothing like the scene of a spectacle, but is instead highly domesticated.

It is also of note that the tormentor of Mildred is, unusually, female, and so is her saviour. Receiving a letter from Mildred, and learning that her beloved daughter is in trouble, Mildred's mother dispatches messengers to the monastery over the sea and

⁵⁸ Herbert J. Thurston and Donald Attwater, eds, *Butler's Lives of the Saints: Complete Edition*, 4 vols (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1990), III, p. 238.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 5 of the Middle English Life of Christina Mirabilis, written by Thomas of Cantimpré, in Jennifer N. Brown, ed., *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d'Oignies* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2008), pp. 51-84.

⁶⁰ Mills, 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', p. 90 and p. 98.

⁶¹ See the examples of nunneries in Kirkless and Burnham in Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 107 and pp. 165-66.

brings Mildred back to England (ll. 129-34). Here, the *vita* of Mildred departs from the narrative pattern of virgin martyr legends: she is saved from her evil tormentor and is not martyred. Mildred's trials are based on the virgin martyr narratives, except for the ending of the martyrdom, in which female virgins are threatened to make them forsake their virginity, are tortured in various eccentric ways, and yet saved by miracles worked by their saviour. The *vita* of Mildred also rewrites the model of the virgin's torture in a feminised, domestic sphere in a nunnery, as is seen in the presence of an evil female persecutor, the symbolic depiction of an oven, and the ultimate saviour, who is her mother.

Concerning this particular scene of torture, although in hagiography the existence of a female authority as a tormentor of a virgin saint is rare, the evil abbess's torture of Mildred can be read in the context of a female monastic community, indicating an aspect of female communities in medieval England. The *SEL vita* apparently describes Mildred's first trial, being baked in the oven, in a comic mode, but then it stresses the brutality of the abbess who pulls Mildred back from the oven and continues to abuse her:

Po þe abbesse þis iseig wroþ heo was inow
 Þe maide heo hente bi þe top & out of þen ouene hire drow.
 & wiþ boþe hire honden harde inow to þe grounde harde hire caste
 & defoulede hire mid hire vet & tred on hire faste.
 Hire tressen heo drow of al ihol arst it smerte wel sore
 Heo beot hire vorte heo weri was þat heo ne mizte na more (ll.
 103-08).

The passage which follows tells of Mildred's emotional letter to her mother, in which Mildred includes her tresses as proof of the cruelty she has endured. Disciplinary violence such as physical punishment could happen in medieval monasteries, including nunneries. *The Rule of Saint Benedict* often refers to corporal punishments,

in most cases the punishment of stripes, for monks who do not amend their faults.⁶² The fifteenth-century Northern metrical version of the Benedictine Rule for nuns describes a nun who is first warned for her misconduct privately; if she does not amend, she is then warned in public; in the worst case, she is excommunicated, receives bodily pain ('And if sche wil not mend hir mynd, / Þan bodely sche salbe pynd'; ll. 1234-35), or is expelled (Chapter XXIII and XXVIII). Various other punishments are described, such as standing in a lower place in the service (Chapter XLIII), or being suspended from the meal entirely (Chapters XXIV and XXV). *The Rewle of Sustris Menouresse Enclosid* states that nuns can be punished by male clerics who visit nunneries (p. 98). Yet, in principle, only the abbess has the authority to punish her nuns in a nunnery. Although the degree of punishment is left to her discretion, the abbess is also advised not to chastise them too severely (*Northern Metrical Version of the Rule of St. Benet*, Chapter II).

There was certainly a distinction between regulated punishment and unregulated violence, yet abusive violence also occurred in medieval nunneries. There was a danger especially of abbesses who gave out extreme punishments. While the *SEL* hagiographer denies the competence of the abbess of Chelles, David Townsend points out that Goscelin presents a paradox between the abbess's proper role and her actual behaviour.⁶³ In Goscelin's Latin *vita*, the abbess persistently exerts her ecclesiastical authority: She calls Mildred 'a rebel to Christ' ('Christi rebellem'; X 123:12) or 'anti-Christ' ('anti-Christam'; X 123:12-13), and preaches to her about

⁶² For example, see Chapters 2, 28, 30, and 45.

⁶³ Townsend, 'Anglo-Latin Hagiography and the Norman Transition', *Exemplaria*, 3.2 (1991), 385-433 (p. 428).

the need for absolute obedience to her abbess by quoting from the Bible.⁶⁴ Such abuse of abbatial authority was also observed in medieval nunneries. Eileen Power explores the conduct of abbesses and prioresses in medieval English nunneries from episcopal registers and visitation documents.⁶⁵ These sources shed light on the relationships constructed in medieval nunneries, and especially their downsides. For example, there was a prioress with a violent temper at Catesby, called Margaret Wavere. At the visit of Bishop Alnwick in 1442, several nuns told him that when the prioress was driven by anger, she rebuked and reproached them by pulling the veils from the nuns' heads, dragging them about by the hair, and calling them beggars and whores, even during the divine office or in front of secular people.⁶⁶ Here, the nuns' statements about this cruel and harsh prioress seem to make her out as even worse than the evil abbess of Chelles in the *vita* of Mildred. The episode of the Nun of Watton in Yorkshire shows another extreme example of violence conducted by nuns against a particular nun.⁶⁷ In the twelfth century, Aelred of Rievaulx documents this episode in which the nun was severely punished by her fellow nuns because of her scandalous behaviour. When the nun's fornication is brought to light, her sister nuns

⁶⁴ Townsend, 'Anglo-Latin Hagiography and the Norman Transition', pp. 427-28. Quotations from Goscelin's *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae* are taken from Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, pp. 108-43.

⁶⁵ A. Hamilton Thompson, ed., *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln*, 3 vols (Oxford: Canterbury and York Society, 1915-27), II, pp. 46-50; see also Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 80.

On the clerical visits and visitation documents, Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, pp. 14-25.

⁶⁶ Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 83.

⁶⁷ On the study of the Nun of Watton, see Giles Constable, 'Aelred of Rievaulx and the Nun of Watton: An Episode in the Early History of the Gilbertine Order', in *Medieval Women: Dedicated and Presented to Rosalind M. T. Hill on the Occasion of her Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 205-26.

rip the veil from her head, and discuss how they should punish this sinner. The younger nuns suggest that she should be burned, skinned alive, tied to a tree, or even roasted over charcoal.⁶⁸ These suggestions for the ways in which the nun in question should be punished bear striking resemblance with how classical virgin martyrs are tortured in hagiography. After this, the nun who committed the sin is depicted as if she were a virgin martyr. She is ‘stripped, stretched out, and whipped without any mercy’ (p. 454), and cast into a prison cell. This is fundamentally different from the episode of Mildred – there, the Nun of Watton is tortured for having a sexual relationship with a lay brother, while Mildred is tortured for not having a relationship with her suitor knight – but both stories deal with abusive violence directed against a woman by women within medieval nunneries.

On this particular scene of violence in ‘The Nun of Watton’, Salih argues that there is an opposition between the sinner nun and the mass of nuns, who share a collective identity.⁶⁹ Although Mildred is abused solely by her abbess, a similar situation, in which a nun comes into confrontation with a mass of nuns, is also seen in the *vita* of Edburga:

Hire felas hit underzete some and in gret enuie were
 And þouʒten how hi miʒten ontake vorte finden hire þere.
 Hi wenden and stode bi a þorn, as hire wei scholde be
 In an erber, and hudden hem þer, ʒif hi hire miʒten ise (ll. 77-80).

This does not relate such an extreme case as Mildred and the Nun of Watton, but Edburga, who secretly cleans her sister nuns’ shoes and visits a chapel for private

⁶⁸ ‘The Nun of Watton’, trans. by John Boswell, in Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988; repr. 1998), pp. 452-58.

⁶⁹ Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 152-65.

vigils, is spied by her sister nuns because of their ‘gret enuie’ (l. 77) of the saint. Although the *SEL vita* does not describe further details about Edburga’s sister nuns’ intention, the nuns in Osbert’s Latin *vita* of Edburga suspect Edburga of having illicit relationship outside the cloister, just like the incident which happened at Watton.⁷⁰ Because of their ill will, the nuns are later punished by being struck blind, but are cured by Edburga. A similar episode of the saint’s nocturnal visit and a spying monk is found in the Latin *vita* of Cuthbert.⁷¹ Both episodes tell of doubtful monks or sisters who eventually witness a saint’s piety, contrary to their expectations, and are criticised for their behaviour. These stories show monastic fellows’ doubts about and jealousy of a distinguished saintly figure.

These examples of interpersonal problems within female monastic communities are again caused by the failure of constructing spiritual kinship. In terms of the relationship between an abbess and young daughters from noble families, it is feasible enough that such a conflict between Mildred and the abbess of Chelles could have occurred. There is the sixth-century example of rebellious nuns, rather than an abbess, who provoked a riot against their abbess. At the monastery of Poitiers, Clothilda and Basina, both noble princesses, demanded to return to their court and, although their protest ended unsuccessfully, it entailed the removal of their abbess, Leubovera, from her position.⁷² Gregory of Tours, who documented this incident,

⁷⁰ Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 19.

⁷¹ See the anonymous *Life of Cuthbert*, Chapter 2; Bede’s prose *Life of Cuthbert*, Chapter 10, in Bertram Colgrave, ed., and trans, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1969). See also Crane, *Animal Encounters*, pp. 26-27.

⁷² Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, pp. 76-77.

points out the importance of the abbess's rulership of her nunnery.⁷³ The *SEL vitae* of Edburga and Mildred thus shed light not only on the glory of female saints but also on various similarly negative aspects of the relationships within monastic communities, depicting all-female communities, placed in nunneries, swirling with bullying and envy.

The *SEL vita*'s simple dichotomy between the evil abbess of Chelles and the good abbesses of Minster-in-Thamet can in this way be seen as an example of the narrator's misogynistic attitudes towards women. He refers to the evil abbess once again when Mildred herself is appointed abbess. The *SEL* hagiographer describes abbess Mildred as a 'betere abbesse ... on þan oþer biþende see' (l. 147). It is clear that the hagiographer deliberately presents two contrasting figures of abbesses: one represented by Domne Eafe, and eventually Mildred herself, and the other represented by the evil abbess of Chelles. By presenting various pictures of actual abbesses in late medieval England, Power argues that medieval nunneries produced saintly abbesses as well as sinful abbesses.⁷⁴ In this respect, it is a distinct characteristic of the *SEL vita* of Mildred that it does not only deal with an idealised community of monastic women, but also presents a negative image of female communities. It is also of note that the negative representations of the monastery of Chelles, as seen in the episodes of the unwelcome visit of outsiders and the practice of unregulated violence, are based on many of the concerns which late medieval English nunneries actually had. Including those anxieties in his portrayal of contemporary England, the *SEL* hagiographer characteristically sets out a series of events that happened in a monastery far beyond the sea.

⁷³ Lifshitz 'Is Mother Superior?', p. 124.

⁷⁴ Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 89.

4. A Woman in a Strange Land

Mills argues that the episode of Mildred in Chelles associates violence with foreignness, and indeed it is important to consider Mildred's experience in a 'strange', foreign land when interpreting this particular scene, as well as the representation of the evil abbess who is foreign and alien to her.⁷⁵ The quotation from Psalm 45:11, in which the virgin is urged to forsake her people and her father's house ('vorȝet al vol of þi cuppe & þi vader hous also'; l. 58), corresponds to the following description when Mildred forsakes her land and her kin, and introduces the episode of her trials in a foreign country over the sea:

To a nonnerie biȝende þe see þis maide vaire wende
Pat me clepede þe hous of Gale as hire moder hire sende.
Heo vorsok hire lond & al hire kun & tok to strange londe (ll. 63-65).

While the first half of her *vita* focuses on her kinship, especially with her mother, the second half of the narrative deals with her experience in a 'strange londe', away from her 'kun', as an important theme. A 'strange londe' is again referred to by Mildred herself, who complains about her circumstances at Chelles:

In strange londe ich am brouȝt þat I not whoder go
& hi to wham ich am bitake beþ alle min pure fo.
Al todrawe is mi flesch vram toppe to þe to
Peiȝ me wolde me ȝiue a newe wounde I nuste whar sette mo.
Mi maister þat scholde beo me bringeþ neiȝ to deþe
& rat me þe deueles lore þat ich wite me vnneþe.
& þe kuinde of mi ȝonge blod vnstable is ich drede
Be deþ God ȝeue me rapen þan encenti to fol dede.

⁷⁵ Mills, 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', p. 101.

Ich seo so ich am biset aboute mid mine fon
 Pat ich mot here wille don oþer of londe gon.
 3if mi moder wuste ouȝt of mi wo me ȝeue nouȝt worþ a fille
 Ichot heo wolde me henne bringe raþer þan ich aspille (ll. 113-24).

This lengthy passage, presented in the form of the letter which Mildred writes to her mother for help, is distinctive, as it serves as a soliloquy filled with the outpouring of her emotion. The narrator speaks for Mildred's sentiments, whereas other *vitae* of insular female saints mainly focus on exterior depictions, or, if any, personal remarks, only the narrator's commentary on events. As the word 'Planctus' is added in the line before (l. 112) in MS E, Mildred's petition to her mother is based on a literary form of a *planctus* in the Middle Ages. Of the various themes which *planctus* deals with, Mildred's soliloquy is similar to that of complaints made during exile.⁷⁶ One of the characteristics of this literary form is its poetic and dramatic effect, appealing to the audience's emotions.⁷⁷ The cruelty of the violence that Mildred suffers is narrated by Mildred herself. Mildred seems to act defiantly by saying that she would rather die than agree to marry the knight ('þe deueles lore'), but her statements clearly show her loneliness and powerlessness in a foreign country.

If we read the episode of Mildred's adversary in exile in the context of monastic culture in Anglo-Saxon England, however, Mildred's experience of being foreign is not unusual. The *SEL vita* gives an account on why Mildred comes to study under the evil abbess:

A Lord þat so ȝong a þing so wel scholde hire vnderstonde.
 At Gale heo eode to scole in þe nonnerie

⁷⁶ Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1970), pp. 26-31.

⁷⁷ Dronke, *Poetic Individuality*, p. 30.

To lerne þer seruise of God & of oure ledi Marie (ll. 66-68).

Although the *SEL vitae* of Anglo-Saxon women do not deal with their experiences overseas, the episode of Mildred's spiritual training in France reflects on many aspects of female education in the context of active interactions between Anglo-Saxon England and the continent. It seemed common for Anglo-Saxon royal princesses to be sent abroad to learn monastic discipline. According to Bede, Eorcengota, a Kentish princess, daughter of Eorcenberht of Kent, and Seaxburg studied in Brie under Abbess Fara, following the convention, particularly for Anglo-Saxon royal women, of receiving a monastic education on the continent:

At that time, because there were not yet many monasteries founded in England, numbers of people from Britain used to enter the monasteries of the Franks or Gauls to practise the monastic life; they also sent their daughters to be taught in them and to be wedded to the heavenly bridegroom. They mostly went to the monasteries at Brie, Chelles, and Andelys-sur-Seine; among these was Sæthryth, stepdaughter of Anna, king the East Angles mentioned above, and Æthelburh, his daughter (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, III, 8).

As it is often argued that the connection with Gaulish, or Frankish churches, were important to the early history of monasticism in the British Isles, the same holds true for religious women in Anglo-Saxon England.⁷⁸ All monasteries mentioned by Bede – Brie, Chelles, and Andelys-sur-Seine – were Frankish foundations which had close connections with Anglo-Saxon royal women. Brie, or Faremoutiers-en-Brie, was founded by Burgundofara, known as Saint Fara, who was made a nun by an Irish missionary Columban in the early seventh century.⁷⁹ Two daughters of King Anna of

⁷⁸ See James Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Hambledon, 1986), pp. 49-68; Foot, *Veiled Women I*, p. 37.

⁷⁹ On Burgundofara, see Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, with E. Gordon Whatley,

the East Angles governed the double monastery of Faremoutier as abbesses. Andelys-sur-Seine also had two abbesses from an East Anglian royal family. Connections with these Frankish monasteries were firmly established with this East Anglian royal family.⁸⁰ Bede's accounts of the relationships between Anglo-Saxon royal women and Frankish abbeys are replicated in *Liber Eliensis* (I. 2). Mildred's overseas education can also be placed in this family tradition of sending daughters to monasteries abroad.

Contrary to what is described in the *vita* of Mildred, the monastery of Chelles, 'hous of Gale' (l. 64), had a reputation for its efforts in building a spiritual relationship with Anglo-Saxon England. The monastery was first founded by Clotild, wife of King Clovis I, in the sixth century, and then re-founded in the seventh century by Balthild, an English-born queen of the Franks, wife of Clovis II.⁸¹ Balthild is also known as an early example of royal female saints who had both queenly and saintly attributes: while she lived as a nun in her monastery, she still actively participated in government as regent even after her retirement.⁸² Bede also states that Hereswith, Hild's sister, lived in the monastery of Chelles. Following her sister, Hild herself also wanted to go to Chelles when she withdrew from the world

eds and trans., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 155-75.

⁸⁰ Peter Hunter Blair, 'Whitby as a Centre of Learning in the Seventh Century', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 3-32 (p. 32).

⁸¹ Hunter Blair, 'Whitby as a Centre of Learning', p. 32; On Balthild, see Janet L. Nelson, 'Balthild (d. c.680)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn, May 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1691>> [accessed 12 March 2015]; McNamara, Halborg, and Whatley, eds and trans., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, pp. 264-78.

⁸² Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, p. 77.

(*Historia Ecclesiastica*, IV, 23), although this was not realised because of Aidan's dissuasion.⁸³ Balthild's co-founder, Bertila, who was appointed the first abbess of Chelles after the re-foundation, contributed significantly to building a link between Chelles and Anglo-Saxon England. According to her hagiographer, she did not only accept royal women seeking instruction in her monastery, but also answered requests from Saxon kings to help them found their own monasteries in England by sending devout women and men, together with saints' relics and volumes of books.⁸⁴ Milburga, the first abbess of Much Wenlock before the appointment of Mildred's sister, is often considered to have been one of those religious women dispatched by Bertila to England because of her Frankish name, Liobsind.⁸⁵

As part of their spiritual exchanges, early medieval Kent had a close relationship with northern France through their trading activities. Ecclesiastical communities were also involved in importing commodities used in churches such as wine, wax candles, and oil.⁸⁶ It is known that Minster-in-Themet owned its own ships. There are

⁸³ See also *Liber Eliensis*, I. 7.

On Hereswith's entry into the monastery of Chelles, while Hunter Blair states that she might have gone there before the re-foundation, McClure and Collis doubts the validity of Bede's account, arguing that it is unlikely that the monastery would not have been known to Anglo-Saxon royal women before Balthild's re-foundation in 660. See Hunter Blair, 'Whitby as a Centre of Learning', p. 32; McClure and Collins, eds, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 389 and p. 407.

⁸⁴ Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 110. Although this episode is not included, on the life of Bertila, see also McNamara, Halborg, and Whatley, eds and trans., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, pp. 279-88.

⁸⁵ H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* ([Leicester]: Leicester University Press, 1961), pp. 208-09; Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, p. 58; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 110-11.

⁸⁶ Susan Kelly, 'Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 1 (1992), 3-28 (p. 14).

charters referring to the remission of tolls on its ships, granted by the kings to abbesses, including Mildred and her successors, Edburga (NB: not of Winchester) and Sigeburh (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, S 86, 87, 91, and 29).⁸⁷ Ships were supposedly used for trading these goods between London and Kent or between Kent and the continent.⁸⁸

Trading goods between England and the continent is also seen in the episode of Mildred's acquisition of holy relics in France. Mildred draws on continental authority when she goes back to Minster-in-Thamet. She brings a souvenir from France to her abbey: three nails used for crucifying Christ:

Wiþ hire heo brouzte into Engeland of þe nayles þreo
Wharwiþ oure swete Lord was inailed to þe treo (ll. 134-35)

Schulenburg counts the collection of relics as one of the primary roles for abbesses, especially those who were once queens, as well as their roles in administration, education, and the practice of hospitality as abbesses, making them candidates for sainthood.⁸⁹ There are several examples of female saints as relic collectors. Originating with Helena, who is known for her *inventio*, or the finding of a part of Jesus's Holy Cross, there were the sixth-century Frankish queen and abbess, Saint Radegund of Poitiers, who started to collect relics of saints even before she entered her nunnery, the seventh-century Belgian saint, Reyneldis/Reineldis, who acquired holy relics on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the eleventh-century Saint Adela of Flanders, who gained relics of a pope and a saint for the foundation of her monastery,

⁸⁷ Kelly, 'Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England', pp. 4-6

⁸⁸ S. E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury and Minster-in Thanet*, Anglo-Saxon Charters, IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. cxv.

⁸⁹ Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex*, p. 63.

and the eleventh-century Irmagardis of Cologne, who carried the relics of the eleven thousand virgins from Rome back to Cologne.⁹⁰ An Anglo-Saxon saint, Edith of Wilton, is also known to have owned a fragment of a nail from the Passion, similar to the ones Mildred acquired in France.⁹¹ As some of these examples show, Mildred's acquisition of relics played an important role of the re-foundation of the abbey by a new abbess, Mildred. After the instalment of holy relics, the narrative tells how the abbey thrived under the abbacy of Mildred. From the episode of Mildred's import of Christ's relics from the continent into England, it is possible to gain a glimpse into the early English Church's dependence on Frankish abbeys. The custom of sending Anglo-Saxon royal women abroad for their spiritual education is also considered in the context of such commercial relationships between Kent and Francia. For these relationships there was an established link between Kent and the continent in the early Middle Ages.

In spite of the long-standing relationship between Frankish abbeys and Anglo-Saxon royal women and the good reputation of the monastery of Chelles for its generous abbesses, the abbess under whom Mildred learned is depicted as behaving far below what is expected from a good abbess. The abbess, Wilcoma, as she is called in the Latin *vitae*, was most probably a historical figure. Her evil nature is also elaborated in the Latin *vitae*, and this does not mean that the late medieval *SEL* hagiographer creates this character, ignoring the historical context of active interactions between England and the monastery of Chelles in Anglo-Saxon England.

⁹⁰ Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex*, pp. 86-88. For the Middle English *vita* of Radegund, printed by Richard Pynson, see F. Brittain, ed., *The Life of Saynt Radegunde: Edited from the copy in Jesus College Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926).

⁹¹ See *Wilton Chronicle*, ll. 1380-95 in Mary Dockray-Miller, ed. and trans., *Saints Edith and Æthelthryth: Princesses, Miracle Workers, and their Late Medieval Audience: The Wilton Chronicle and the Wilton Life of St Æthelthryth* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 38-333.

However, it is also possible to read this episode in the context of the *SELS*' anti-Norman or anti-French attitudes, as is often argued. The negative representation of the French abbess in the *vita* of Mildred could have resulted from such antipathy found in some of the *SEL vitae*.

The *SEL* narrators' sheer hostility towards the Normans and French is explicitly shown in accounts of the Norman Conquest in which Harold was defeated by William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings. As scholars such as Wells, Laurel Braswell, Görlach, Renee Hamelinck, and Mills argue, the most representative example is the *vita* of Wulfstan who was a bishop of Worcester in the eleventh century.⁹² Wulfstan was not just a witness of the Norman Conquest, but his *vita* also contains the episode of his conflict with the new English king, William. The mournful narration in the *vita* begins with the death of Edward the Confessor, the last Anglo-Saxon king, who made Wulfstan a bishop of Worcester:

þo seint Edward þe holie kyng wende out of þis liue.
 Gret reuþe it was to al engelond so weilawei þe stounde!
 For straunge men þere comen suthþe and brou3ten enguelond to
 grounde.
 Harold was þo ri3htest eyr for non oþur þere nas;
 Þe croune he bar of Enguelonde 3wuche 3wile so it was.
 For willame Bastard, þat was þo Eorl in Noremaundie,
 Pou3te to winne Enguelond þoru3 strençþe and tricherie:
 he let him greiþi folk i-nou3 and gret poer with him nam
 And with gret strençþe in-to þe se he him dude and to Enguelonde he
 cam (ll. 58-66).⁹³

⁹² See Wells, 'The Structural Development of the *SEL*', pp. 324-26; Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 34; Hamelinck, 'St Kenelm and the Legends of the English Saints in the *SEL*', pp. 19-28; Mills, 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', pp. 100-01.

⁹³ Horstmann, ed., 'The Life of Wulfstan' in *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 70-77. All quotations from the *SEL vita* of Wulfstan is, unless otherwise noted, from Horstmann's edition based on MS

The subsequent passages continue to depict his destruction, plunder, and assassinations in England, emphasising the brutality and cruelty of William the Conqueror, who is also referred to as ‘bastard’ three times in the *vita* (l. 63, l. 93, and l. 206). It is pointed out that the *SEL vita* of Wulfstan slightly differs in each manuscript in its attitudes towards William the Conqueror.⁹⁴ The *vita* in the earliest surviving manuscript L, compiled in the late thirteenth century, contains the harshest descriptions, and its particular references to the word ‘heir’ are amended or omitted from the later manuscripts. For example, the L text’s claim that Harold was the ‘ri3htest eyr for non oþur þere nas’ (l. 61) is slightly toned down in MS C, modified to read that he was ‘subþe kyng’ (l. 61).⁹⁵ The L *vita* even contains a long passage, which could possibly imply the challenge to contemporary English kings, and which is omitted from later manuscripts:

And neuer-eft it ne cam a-3ein to ri3ht Eyres none-
 Vnkuynde Eyres 3eot huy beoþþ ore kingues echone,
 And neizh-3wat alle þis hei3e Men and of þe lo3we al-so (ll. 89-91).⁹⁶

Such anti-Norman descriptions are unique to the *SEL vita*. With no source found, it is rather strikingly in contrast with its contemporary texts which deal with Wulfstan.⁹⁷ In addition to the special position of Worcester in the *SELS* as the original place of

L.

⁹⁴ Wells, ‘The Structural Development of the *SEL*’, pp. 324-26; Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, p. 34.

⁹⁵ On the *vita* of Wulfstan in MS C, see D’Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The ‘SEL’*, pp. 8-15. Wells points out that MS P makes the same change. See ‘The Structural Development of the *SEL*’, p. 325.

⁹⁶ See also Wells, ‘The Structural Development of the *SEL*’, p. 325.

⁹⁷ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the ‘SEL’*, p. 34; Wells, ‘The Structural Development of the *SEL*’, p. 325. For a comparative analysis, see Erin Mullally, ‘The “Kundeste Englisce Man”: The Englishing of St. Wulfstan of Worcester in the *SEL*’, *English Studies*, 92.6 (2011), 587-606.

their production, Braswell attributes the *L vita*'s particular hostility towards William and his descendants to the provenance of MS L in Worcester, where Wulfstan was locally venerated, and thus attracted sympathy from local devotees because of William's ill-treatment of their bishop.⁹⁸

As is the case with the *vita* of Mildred, William and his army are described by using words such as 'straunge men' (l. 60, l. 75, and l. 102) and 'men of opere londe' (l. 93). Along with William's strangeness, the word, 'vnkyunde' is also used for describing William. Besides various other meanings, such as 'unnatural', 'unlawful', and 'harsh', the word also means 'foreign'. It contrasts with the portrayal of Wulfstan, who argues against William the new king: 'For he was þo þe cuyndeste engliche man þat was of enie manhede' (l. 106). The word 'cuynde' suggests the legitimacy of Wulfstan's bishophood, conferred by his born quality. According to this meaning, the meaning of 'kunne' and 'kun' (l. 1 and l. 65) overlap; the latter word is stressed in the *vita* of Mildred, from which Mildred's sanctity comes, although she once abandons it. More importantly, 'cuynde' also suggests, as an antonym of 'straunge', his identity as a native-born Englishman. In the *vita* of Wulfstan, too, the *SEL* narrator presents an obvious contrast between Wulfstan and William, by labelling them respectively as the 'kindest', or the most native, English man and the most 'unkind' and 'strange'. In the *vita* of Mildred, although it similarly sets a bad French abbess against good English abbesses, these words are used to describe places rather than women, presenting an opposition between England, where her 'kun' is, and France as a 'straunge' and therefore unkind land.

⁹⁸ Braswell, 'The South English Legendary Collection', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 1964, qtd in Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 34. Breckenridge argues that Worcestershire is placed at the centre of both the geographical world and of Christendom in the *SELS*. See her 'Mapping Identity in the *SEL*', pp. 332-44.

On the attitudes on the Normans' side, the debate has been whether they were sceptical or respectful of Anglo-Saxon saints. In support of the belief in the hostile and sceptical Normans, there is the argument that although the *SEL vita* of Wulfstan does not treat him as aggressively as William, the first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, who 'dom him [Wulstan] schame' (l. 116) of depriving him of the position of bishop, is often seen as a key person in considering a controversy concerning the cult of saints between new Norman clerics and old Anglo-Saxon clerics and local devotees. Lanfranc is known for his initial doubts on the authenticity of the old English saints, which is sometimes argued as evidence of the Norman cleric's disrespectful attitudes.⁹⁹ S. J. Ridyard, however, modifies such views of Norman scepticism, demonstrating how the Norman clerics actually utilised the cult of old saints in England rather than disrespected or disdained them.¹⁰⁰ Lanfranc's hesitancy regarding the cult of Alphege did not come from Norman hostility, but rather by his questioning the authenticity of the cult, which was partly caused by the lack of *vita*e of Alphege.¹⁰¹ On the post-Conquest cult of Mildred, whose extensive Latin *vita* was produced by Goscelin, Lanfranc was involved in the translation of Mildred's relics from Lyminge to St Gregory's, and embroiled in a

⁹⁹ See, for example, see David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 940-1216*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 118-19.

¹⁰⁰ Ridyard, 'Condigna Veneratio: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 9 (1987), 179-206. Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1986, ed. by R. Allen Brown. For debates on Lanfranc's attitudes towards Anglo-Saxon saints, see also Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, pp. 87-88.

¹⁰¹ Rollason, *The Midrith Legend*, p. 59; H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Lanfranc: Scholar, Monk, Archbishop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 178-80. Although he argues that Lanfranc was sceptical about Anglo-Saxon saints, Frank Barlow also points out that the lack of Latin *vita*e of Anglo-Saxon saints was one reason of their sentiments. See Barlow, *The English Church, 1066-1154* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 191.

dispute over the possession of her relics with St Augustine's, Canterbury, which suggests this Norman archbishop's acceptance of this Anglo-Saxon holy woman.¹⁰² As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the cult of Anglo-Saxon saints survived from the Conquest through adaptation and assimilation, with the promotion of saints' shrines and compilations of hagiography in which Anglo-Saxon saints are presented as 'English' saints. Considering this background, it is striking to discover Anglo-Saxons' struggles against the Normans in thirteenth-century documents, even if they were caused by local affection directed towards Wulfstan. The three manuscripts of the *SEL* *vita* of Mildred (E, B, V) contain the *vita* of Wulfstan, but, according to Görlach, the *vita* of Wulfstan appearing in these manuscripts does not retain such a degree of anti-Normanism as seen in the *vita* in MS L and other earlier manuscripts; instead, they omit or modify parts specifically concerned with English heirs.¹⁰³ Hostile attitudes towards the French in the *vita* of Mildred may not be as explicit as in the earliest *vita* of Wulfstan, but those elements are reflected in the figure of the evil abbess in France, displaying slight xenophobia as well as misogyny.

The monastery of Chelles, including its abbess, also serves to mirror negative aspects of the community of late medieval English nunneries. In terms of the apparent xenophobia seen in the *SELS*, there is also a question of the extent to which the French are seen as 'other' to the English. The *SELS* depict various 'others' in the *vitae* of saints. Mills argues that others in the *SELS* do not constitute a single

¹⁰² Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, p. 60; Cowdrey, *Lanfranc*, pp. 167-70 and p. 184. On the posthumous translation of Mildred, see Richard Sharpe, 'Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildred: Hagiography and Liturgy in Context', *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns, 41.2 (1990), 502-16.

¹⁰³ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 136.

stereotype but widely vary in territory, language, and belief, such as Saracens, Jews, pagans, and Normans.¹⁰⁴ In terms of Normans or French, Ardis Butterfield, in her study of the cultural and linguistic relationships between (the) English and (the) French in the age of the Hundred Years War, points out that it is important to consider their fundamental likeness rather than difference or separation when addressing the relationship between the two countries.¹⁰⁵ The otherness of the French abbess in the *SEL vita* is simply seen in the sentence that marks the appointment of Mildred to abbess of Minster-in-Thanel: [Mildred is] ‘betere abbesse was on þan þe oþer biþende see’ (l. 147). As she is described as ‘þe oþer’, the French abbess is always paired with Mildred or Domne Eafe. As in their motherhood and abbacy, she takes up the other half of the quality which is split into two, which suggests that negative representations of an abbess and her nunnery actually mirror the self, just as the depiction of the monastery of Chelles reflects the negative side of late medieval English nunneries. The abbess of Chelles is, therefore, more a representation of the familiar evil, who is symbolically depicted as being ‘far beyond the sea’, than a complete ‘other’.

The *SEL vita* of Mildred presents various forms of relationships: from those expected to be found in saints’ legends, or more specifically, the legends of monastic women, such as relationships between good and evil, man and woman, abbess and nun, to those emphatically depicted in the *vita* of Mildred, such as relationships between mother and daughter, human and animal, and the English and the French. Among various pictures of such contacts, this chapter has examined female

¹⁰⁴ Mills, ‘The Early *SEL* and Difference: Race, Place, Language, and Belief’, in *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108*, pp. 197-221 (p. 199).

¹⁰⁵ Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 1.

relationships, mainly constructed between Mildred, Domne Eafe, and the evil abbess of Chelles. Their relationships are characteristically depicted within a highly feminised sphere. The close relationship between Mildred and Domne Eafe, as symbolised by their reading of a feminine passage in the psalms, suggests the ideal of both biological and spiritual kinship between religious women. Mildred's confrontation with the evil abbess of Chelles is a noticeable rewriting of classical virgin martyr legends, transforming a pagan male tormentor into a French female monastic superior. The representation of the evil abbess of Chelles, who is also deliberately contrasted with Mildred and Domne Eafe, implies the hagiographer's misogynistic views of women; xenophobic attitudes are also observed in the hagiographer's attempt to associate violence and foreignness of the evil abbess with 'a woman beyond the sea'. The *SEL vita* of Mildred, however, does not merely present a simple binary opposition between two of Mildred's spiritual mothers; the episode in the monastery of Chelles actually reflects on the anxieties and concerns about nunneries and their superiors in late medieval England. While applying the opposition between good and bad abbesses to domestic and foreign nunneries on the surface, the *vita* actually addresses the social problems familiar to the insular audience. Through the representation of the evil abbess of Chelles, the *SEL vita* of Mildred raises an important question of what the other was for late medieval England. By using the otherness of a foreign woman, it suggests relationships, which cannot be considered monolithically, between the self and other.

Chapter 4

Saint Edburga of Winchester: Women's Status and Male Authorities

1. Introduction

Saint Edburga was a tenth-century nun of St Mary's Abbey at Winchester, known as Nunnaminster. The *SEL* version of Edburga, which appears in the three manuscripts of the 'E' branch, is important as the only surviving version of her legend written in Middle English.¹ Like other unique texts of the Winchester saints in the *SELS*, her *vita* was perhaps included for the importance of her locality. Although sources of the *SEL vita* of Edburga have not been identified, there are several accounts of Edburga in Latin.² There are two complete *vitae* of Edburga in Latin: first, Osbert of Clare's extensive *vita* of Edburga in the thirteenth century; second, the *vita* compiled in the Romsey Legendary. Also, a fragment that includes part of the legend of Edburga survives in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 451.³ In contrast, there is no surviving Middle English *vita*, not even in the *Kalendre of the Newe Lwgvnde of Englande*, translated from John of Tynmouth's *Nova Legenda Anglie*, in which all the other four

¹ D'Evelyn and Foster, 'Saints' Legends', p. 580.

² Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester', p. 311-12.

³ On Latin *vitae*, see Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester', pp. 300-304. On Osbert of Clare's Latin *vita*, see Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 253-308; For the Lansdowne version, see Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester', pp. 329-333; For the fragment from a Life of Edburga in MS Bodley 451, see Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 309.

Also, in terms of historical writings, part of the Legend of Edburga appears in various sources, as represented by William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum anglorum*. See further Braswell, 'St Edburga of Winchester', pp. 305-310.

insular saints are included.

Along with this lack of a vernacular contemporary *vita*, Edburga is also different from other Anglo-Saxon and British female saints in the *SELS* in that her life was rather uneventful. She led a relatively quiet life until her death, whereas other abbesses had a number of tribulations highly reminiscent of those of classical virgin martyrs, such as attempted rape and extraordinary tortures. In this respect, she was, in one way, more obscure than those of other *SEL* abbesses, and her *vita* can be regarded as an archetype of the narrative of monastic women. Moreover, the remarkable environment of Anglo-Saxon Winchester contributed to making Edburga a saint. The *SEL vita* significantly illustrates how her statuses and power were constructed in hagiography. Throughout the text, the *SEL vita* suggests that Edburga's status was built upon relationships with secular and clerical male authorities in Winchester.

This chapter explores medieval women's religious status through the *SEL vita* of Edburga. Of all the various religious status of women, such as nuns, anchoresses, and vowesses, abbesses were one of the most important examples of medieval women with institutional power. Since female saints in the medieval British Isles included in the *SELS* were all nuns and abbesses of noble birth, often called royal saints, the hagiographers and compilers of the *SELS* were certainly interested in depicting early medieval women with power. Yet, while we know from historical and hagiographical records that the other four saints in the *SELS* were definitely appointed as abbesses of their nunneries, Edburga's status as an abbess is sometimes questioned, due to the lack of medieval witnesses. However, although the existence of her actual abbacy at Nunnaminster remains uncertain, I will demonstrate how her status, which could equal that of a royal abbess saint, was constructed, by analysing symbolic motifs in her narrative and comparing her especially with male authoritative figures, both secular

and clerical. First, although the *SEL vita* does not explicitly present Edburga as an abbess, the two objects which she possesses, namely a chalice and a book of the gospels, symbolically suggest and support her abbatial power. Second, as pointed out in the preceding chapters, the hagiographers of medieval holy women were certainly based on conventional narrative patterns of virgin martyrs when they attempted to embed their saints in the framework of narratives of saints' legends. Yet they were also influenced by the narratives of secular and clerical male figures, which is particularly evident in the *vita* of Edburga. In this chapter, I argue that such models that surrounded Edburga in Winchester played a significant role in fashioning her authoritative status there.

2. Edburga's Royal Genealogy

Edburga's status and identity are defined first by her earthly male relatives and then by her spiritual colleagues in Winchester. The *SEL vita* of Edburga begins with long passages on the genealogy of her family. About a quarter of her *vita* is devoted to explaining her royal lineage in relation to Winchester. Names mentioned in these passages include various kings and saints, sometimes with information about their resting places, where their bodies and relics are buried and enshrined, such as 'Schafteburi' (l. 7), 'Westminstre' (l. 9), and 'Winchestre' (l. 21). First, the hagiographer mentions Edburga's father, Edward the Elder, and then rather digressively moves on to explaining the so-called 'four Edwards' – Edward the Elder (l. 2), Edward the Martyr (l. 5), Edward the Confessor (l. 9), and Edward I (l. 11). He next goes back to Edburga's grandfather, King Alfred, who, the narrator says, made laws, was first anointed and crowned at Rome, and was buried in Winchester (ll. 13-

22). The narrative of Edburga itself starts only after the poet has mentioned her three brothers, Athelstan, Edmund, and Eadred, all of whom succeeded their father's crown (ll. 25-26). After the digressive list of holy kings, the hagiographer finishes this long genealogy by stating:

Pe king Aþelston was is sone, þat after him com anon,
And king Edmund and king Eldred, þat kinges were echon,
Seint Eadborw is daughter was, of whan we moten ende (ll. 25-28).⁴

It is common for Anglo-Saxon royal abbesses to be defined in relation to their family, especially their fathers. The *SEL* narrator's emphasis on her patrilineal family by devoting so much space to describing her ancestors and their descendants suggests that their presence shapes Edburga's identity in the *vita*.

Yet, this does not mean that there are no significant female ancestors and descendants in Edburga's lineage. Although the *SEL vita* remains silent on her female family members, the West Saxon dynasty produced cults of royal saints, including women, and Edburga is one of the most popular royal women in this family, celebrated in the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁵ Also, the West-Saxon foundations of religious houses are closely related to women of this family. There are three nunneries

⁴ All quotations from the *SEL* version of the Life of Edburga are from Braswell, 'St Edburga of Winchester', pp. 325-29.

⁵ M. A. Meyer lists thirteenth popular female saints: Ealburh, sister of King Ecgbert of Wessex; Eadburh [Edburga] and Æthelflaed, daughters of Edward the Elder; Eadgyth, daughter of Edgar; Æthelflaed, a relative of Athelstan; Æthelflaed, a relative of Queen Ælfthryth; Æthelgifu, mother of King Edgar and wife of Edmund; Eaplauhswith, wife of Alfred the Great; Æthelgifu, daughter of Alfred; Margaret of Scotland, grand-daughter of Edmund Ironside; Wulfthryth, the mother of Eadgyth and consort of King Edgard; and Wulfhid, a relative of the tenth-century West Saxon kings. See Meyer, 'Patronage of the West Saxon Royal Nunneries in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Revue Bénédictine*, 91 (1981), 332-58, (pp. 333-34, n. 3).

associated with Alfred.⁶ First, Shaftsbury Abbey was founded by Alfred for his daughter Æthelgifu.⁷ Second, Nunnaminster was founded by Ealhswith, wife of Alfred, and finally, Wilton Abbey was patronised by the West Saxon royal family.⁸ Those royal nunneries were founded, not only as places where these family member could live as nuns, like Edburga in Winchester and Æthelgifu in Shaftsbury, but also as places for retirement, such as Ælfflæd, the second wife of Edward the Elder, who entered Nunnaminster after her marriage to Edward was dissolved, and for burial, such as Ælfflæd and her daughters, Eadflæd and Æthelhild in Wilton.⁹ It is of note that both Alfred and his wife, Ealhswith, were engaged in building convents for women. Ealhswith, the grandmother of Edburga, is particularly important for Edburga. Osbert of Clare in his *vita* of Edburga states that Queen Ealhswith initiated the foundation of the nunnery, which was later completed by Edward the Elder after the death of Ealhswith.¹⁰ The presence of Ealhswith as a founder of this nunnery is, however, gradually overshadowed by her granddaughter, Edburga, inside the community.¹¹ The omission of her female ancestor in the *SEL vita* may simply be a result of the fact that this foundress had gradually been forgotten, but it also highlights the text's emphasis

⁶ Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, pp. 76-77.

⁷ Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, pp. 76-77; On Shaftsbury Abbey, see also Foot, *Veiled Women II*, pp. 165-77.

⁸ On Nunnaminster, see Foot, *Veiled Women II*, pp. 243-52; on Wilton Abbey, see Foot, *Veiled Women II*, pp. 221-31.

⁹ On Ælfflæda's entry to Nunnaminster, see Meyer, 'Women and the Tenth Century English Monastic Reform', *Revue Bénédictine*, 87 (1977), 34-61 (p. 47); Foot, *Veiled Women II*, p. 244, n. 6. On the burial of Ælfflæda and her daughters, see Foot, *Veiled Women II*, p. 226. On the nunneries as a place for widowed and repudiated royal women's retirement, see Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, pp. 175-190.

¹⁰ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 98.

¹¹ Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, p. 77.

on the male line in her family.

The lengthy passages about Edburga's male ancestors serve to shape her sanctity as well as confer secular authority on her. In hagiography, there appear some parents, even though all of them are not canonised as saints, who are depicted as pious and leading their children to sainthood. The genealogy of Edburga includes saints, namely Edward the Martyr and Edward the Confessor, both of whom are distinguished from others by the *SEL* hagiographer, who describes each of them as a 'seint' (l. 5 and l. 9). The *vitae* of these two Edwards, as well as that of Edward the Elder, are also compiled in the *SELS*.¹² Even though her grandfather, King Alfred, is not recognised as a saint, both Alfred and Edward the Elder play an important role in leading Edburga to sainthood by cultivating her spiritual interest and offering her an education and an institution to live in. The emphasis on her male kinship is laid mainly upon their legitimacy in the secular world, but also upon their saintly kinship, which is certainly one of the reasons of her incorporation into the *SELS*.

3. Edburga's Chalice and Gospel Book

Of the five Anglo-Saxon and British female saints, Edburga is the only one whose actual abbacy is not known today. Modern scholarship concerning the abbacy of Edburga is split between those who regard her as an abbess and those who avoid making that claim, due to the paucity of medieval sources, even though they do not go so far as to declare that she was *not* an abbess. The former scholars' view was first

¹² See 'The Life of Edward the Elder', in Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 47-53 and D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 110-18.

presented by Walter de Gray Birch in his edition of the Book of Nunnaminster.¹³ According to Sarah Foot, Birch's idea has been accepted by modern scholars, even though there remain no medieval documents which describe Edburga as an abbess.¹⁴ Their arguments seem to be based on the convention of royal nuns and abbesses. When a nunnery was founded by a royal family for a daughter of that family, it was customary for her to be entrusted with organising the community and for her eventually to be installed as abbess. For example, Edith, nun and abbess of Wilton and, like Edburga, a royal saint of a West Saxon dynasty, who lived and died slightly later than Edburga in the second half of the tenth century, became an abbess of Nunnaminster, Barking, and Wilton Abbey. Although Edburga died relatively young, at the age of thirty, her royal background and power inherited from her family would have certainly been good enough to give her the status of an abbess. The doubts about her abbacy mainly stem from the lack of medieval sources that describe Edburga as an abbess. Some names of abbesses in Nunnaminster are known today. Following Osbert of Clare, who often mentions names of abbesses in Nunnaminster, the *SEL* hagiographer refers to two abbesses in his *vita*: Æthelthryth, the first abbess of Nunnaminster, who teaches Edburga when she enters the nunnery, and Alfghena, an abbess at the time of Edburga's translation to Pershore.¹⁵ Despite these records of abbesses in Nunnaminster, no medieval source, including hagiographic accounts such as Osbert's *vita* and the *SEL vita*, or historical accounts, such as William of

¹³ Walter de Gray Birch, *An Ancient Manuscript of the Eighth or Ninth Century: Formerly Belonging to St. Mary's Abbey, or Nunnaminster, Winchester* (London: Simpkins and Marshall, Stationer's Hall Court, 1889), p. 6.

¹⁴ Foot, *Veiled Women II*, p. 248. See also Braswell, 'St Edburga of Winchester', p. 292.

¹⁵ On Osbert's 'history' of abbesses in Nunnaminster, see Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 33-34.

Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, mentions the abbacy of Edburga. This identification was in fact first made in the sixteenth century by John Leland, who stated that Edburga was appointed an abbess of Nunnaminster.¹⁶ As is the case with other medieval sources of Edburga, the *SEL* hagiographer does not tell us how she was appointed as an abbess of her nunnery. Except for Butler in his *Lives of the Saints*, who clearly states that she never became an abbess, scholars such as Susan J. Ridyard and Foot carefully avoid claiming that Edburga was or was not an abbess of Nunnaminster, regarding the lack of documents as crucial to the matter.¹⁷ In my opinion, given that all three Anglo-Saxon and one Welsh female saints in the *SELS* were abbesses, it is plausible that the *SEL* hagiographer compiled the *vita* of Edburga as an abbess, like the others. Yet it is equally interesting to consider the reasons for her inclusion in the *SELS* if she was not an abbess. In this section, by analysing the first episode of Edburga, symbolic objects appearing in the *vita* serve to shape and fashion Edburga's status which could equate to her abbacy.

After setting out her royal lineage, the *SEL* hagiographer describes one of the most symbolic episodes in the Edburga legend. When Edburga is as young as three years old, she is offered various gifts by her father. The young Edburga abandons gold, silver, and precious jewels and chooses holy goods – a chalice and a book of gospels – which become important items for shaping her status at her nunnery:

Unneþe heo was þreo 3er old þo hir fader hire let bringe
Gold and seluer and giweles of precious þinge,
And a bok of þe gospels, and a challis also,

¹⁶ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 33-34; Foot, *Veiled Women II*, p. 245 and p. 248.

¹⁷ Thurston and Attwater, eds, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, II, p. 548; Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 33-34; Foot, *Veiled Women II*, p. 248.

To fonde which heo wolde hir hond furst undo.
As 3ong as þis maide was heo drow to hire þis bok,
And þis challis among þis oþre, and þat oþer forsook (ll. 28-34).¹⁸

This episode can be considered as a typical episode of a saint's early dedication to Christianity, which is commonly found in hagiography. Goscelin describes a similar episode of the saint's vocation in more detail in his *vita* of Edith.¹⁹ In the case of Edith, her mother tests the two-year-old girl by spreading a number of items on the floor, ranging from secular objects which represent 'royal dignity and women's ambition', such as jewels and ornaments, to goods for the spiritual life, including a black veil, a chalice, a paten – the dish of Christ's Passion – and a psalter (5:44).²⁰ Like Edburga, Edith's choice of spiritual items convinces her mother of her vocation and she enters Wilton Abbey together with her mother.

Both episodes clearly show the saints' voluntary dedication to Christian life, but as is often the case, historical accounts tell a slightly different story. Edward the Elder is delighted to learn that Edburga is better suited for a spiritual life as a nun, since it is likely to have been his intention as well to send his youngest daughter to the nunnery. At that time, he had already married his five daughters off to kings in Europe.²¹ The

¹⁸ All quotations from the Life of Saint Edburga are from Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester', pp. 325-329.

¹⁹ Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, p. 111.

²⁰ 'The *Vita* of Edith', trans. by Michael Wright and Kathleen Loncar, in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and 'Liber confortatorius'*, ed. by Stephanie Hollis, W. R. Barnes, Rebecca Hayward, Kathleen Loncar, and Michael Wright (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2004), pp. 21-93.

²¹ Edward the Elder had nine daughters with his three wives. Apart from Edburga, who was born with his last wife, Eadgifu, two of them, Eadflæd and Æthelhild, were daughters with his second wife, Ælfflæd, and were respectively a nun and a lay recluse. Sean Miller, 'Edward [Edward the Elder] (870s?-924)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn September 2011

sorting of daughters either into secular marriage or nunneries was often seen as one of the strategies for noble families to seek further power and maintain their family status. Yet, in hagiography, it is always important to emphasise the saint's autonomy and decision-making in their spiritual pursuits. Symbolic episodes in their childhood, such as Edburga's, function as part of an important narrative pattern to make them more ideal hagiographic figures.

The episode has more significant meanings: both chalice and book are priestly possessions as well as attributes of pious women. First, a chalice is a complex symbol, demonstrating both feminine piety and masculine authority. Given that it is a vessel used for the Eucharist, Edburga's choice of a chalice can be read as an expression of feminine Eucharistic piety. In her discussions of the thirteenth-century female mystics, Bynum states that devotion to the Eucharist is a 'characteristically female concern'.²² Although it suits late medieval representations of religious women better than early medieval Anglo-Saxon saints such as Edburga, Bynum argues that desire for the Eucharist is the central theme in many writings of female religious, and a number of miracles and visions of the Eucharist were performed and seen particularly by religious women.²³ In an age when women were strictly excluded from male clerical tasks, the Eucharistic ecstasy of the women, who are 'prophetic' and 'charismatic', also allows them to gain an alternative to priesthood. Their desire for the Eucharist gives them access to the inaccessible altar, a space otherwise only permitted to male clerics, in their visions.²⁴ In these views of the Eucharist, even though the Eucharistic

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8514>> [accessed 14 January 2013].

²² Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p.121.

²³ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 122-23.

²⁴ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 135-36.

desire is seen as feminine, a chalice, as a tool used for administering the Eucharist, may also appear as a symbol of male clerical authority, which is not available to women.

The episode in which the young Edburga chooses and actually possesses the chalice is prophetic of her later life as a monastic superior. Religious women's devotion to the Eucharist, as Bynum argues, reflects their desire for the priesthood. Yet the example of Edburga is different from that of other pious women, as her chalice is not a visionary object but is actually possessed by her. The chalice appears simply as a gift along with other material objects. Edburga's chalice here represents a symbol of authority rather than of her feminine piety.

The Latin *vita* of Edburga more clearly suggests that her choice is seen as not particularly feminine. Osbert of Clare lists not only a chalice and a gospel book, as appears in the *SEL vita*, but also a paten as gifts for Edburga ('textum ... euangelicum, et patenam et calicem'; p. 265).²⁵ Although a paten as a plate for holding the host is also one of the essential items used for the Eucharist, it does not seem to appear in Eucharistic visions as frequently as do a chalice and the host. Rather, the appearance of a paten along with a chalice highlights Edburga's priestly choice. Moreover, Osbert describes secular goods which Edburga forsakes as 'women's possessions' ('instrumenta attrahere feminea'; p. 265). He consciously emphasises that her choice is not based on her gender, or what ordinary girls are supposed to do, by emphasising her sanctity.

A chalice often represents priesthood for clerics and for religious women, the

²⁵ All quotations from Osbert of Clare's *Life of St Edburga of Winchester* are taken from Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 253-308.

abbacy and their nunneries. Chalices were often buried in priests' graves, along with patens as symbols of the lifetime profession of the dead. Nineteen medieval chalices were excavated from graves at the site of Cathedral Green in Winchester.²⁶ Although none of these chalices were identified as female monastics' possessions, there is an episode of a certain chalice having been in the possession of the last abbess of Winchester in the later Middle Ages. At the time of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, Dame Elizabeth Shelley is believed to have brought a chalice with her from her nunnery before Nunnaminster was destroyed. According to the Winchester College Muniments, Elizabeth Shelley bequeathed the 'little chalice of silver and parcel gilt' to Winchester College for the day when the 'nunnery of St Mary's in Winchester shall have it again in case it be restored and come up again in her time'.²⁷ We can assume that she preserved the chalice as her own, dreaming of the day when Nunnaminster would be rebuilt for a future congregation of pious women. As we know, however, her hopes for the restoration of her nunnery were never realised. Elizabeth's chalice survived from a levy by the Privy Council in 1553, and the College inventory dated in 1556 mentions her chalice, as noted above, but it is no longer found in later

²⁶ Charles Oman, 'Background and Typology', pp. 789-91, and Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, 'Chalices and Patens in Burials', pp. 791-99, in Martin Biddle, with contributions by Ian H. Goodall, David A. Hinton and 81 Other Authors and by the Staff and Volunteers of the Winchester Research Unit, *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), I.

²⁷ John Paul, 'Dame Elizabeth Shelley, Last Abbess of St. Mary's Abbey, Winchester', *Papers and Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 23.2 (1965), 60-71 (p. 70); Mary C. Erler, *Reading and Writing during the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns 1530-1558* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 74-78. This episode is also found in several nineteenth-century writings: for example, see Augusta Theodosia Drane, *The Three Chancellors, or Sketches of the Lives of William Wykeham, William of Waynflete, and Sir Thomas More* (London: Burns and Lambert, 1860), p. 38; Thomas Frederick Kirby, *Annals of Winchester College* (London: H. Frowde, 1892), p. 266.

inventories. Thus, the last chalice from Nunnaminster was apparently lost, or destroyed sometime in the mid-sixteenth century.²⁸ It is hard to believe that Elizabeth's chalice in the sixteenth century is the same as Edburga's in the tenth century, but the episode indicates that a chalice signified the status of abbess in Nunnaminster. In both cases, a chalice served as a re-/start of their lives in the nunnery and even of Nunnaminster itself.

The other object shaping Edburga's status as a royal abbess is 'a bok of þe gospels'. This book, given as a gift, is reminiscent of her grandfather Alfred's book of English poetry, which he received from his mother in his youth. According to Asser's biography of Alfred, his mother shows him and his brothers a book of English poetry and tells them that she will give it to the one who understands and recites it first. Alfred learns it by heart immediately with the help of his tutor.²⁹ Both episodes of their familiarity with books and their learning since childhood also tell how they establish their literacy. Alfred and Edburga are first attracted to books given to them by their parents. Both of them are probably more interested in the physical existence of the books and possession of them. Later, they receive education on how to read from teachers – Alfred from his private tutor, and Edburga from an abbess in her nunnery. As the episode of Alfred, and especially his mother, is often illustrated in discussions of women's role in education, the family is depicted as actively engaged with shaping literacy, regardless of gender.³⁰ The episode of Edburga's gospel book is likely to be

²⁸ I am grateful to Suzanne Foster, archivist of Winchester College, for kindly providing me with images of the inventories and other useful information on Elizabeth Shelley's chalice.

²⁹ See Chapters 22-23 in Keynes and Michael Lapidge, trans., *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and other Contemporary Sources* (Bungay, Suffolk: Penguin, 1983).

³⁰ For example, see Janet L. Nelson, 'Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages', in *Women in the Church: Papers Read at the 1989 Summer Meeting and the 1990 Winter Meeting of*

based on this family tradition, which suggests a cultural aspect of her lineage.

Moreover, her book, especially because it is a book of gospels, represents her quasi-priestly status. In contrast to the gospels, psalms or Psalter books were, of all the various scriptural writings, of particular importance in the quotidian reading life of female religious communities. As reading is one of the most common motifs in the *vitae* of women saints, portraits of young saints as dedicated readers show their piety and education. In the *SEL* version of the Legend of Cecilia, Cecilia carries psalms, even though she is traditionally depicted carrying her gospel book against her chest, and the *SEL vita* describes how she ardently listens to verses of psalms at her wedding.³¹ Many *vitae* of saintly abbesses state that they become acquainted with holy writings, especially the psalms, at a very early age. As discussed in Chapter 3, Frideswide is said to have understood her Psalter in six months (ll. 5-6). The hagiographer states that Mildred became educated by listening to the recitation of the Psalter in a nunnery.³² Whereas an image of pious women eagerly engaged in reading corresponds to the enthusiasm not only of nuns and abbesses but also laywomen outside the cloisters, these episodes demonstrate their partly miraculous piety displayed early in their childhoods, revealing why these women were chosen to be

the Ecclesiastical History Society, ed. by W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 53-78 (pp. 69-70); Patricia Skinner, 'Women, Literacy and Invisibility in Southern Italy, 900-1200', in *Women, the Book and the Worldly: Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 1-11 (p. 9); Michelle P. Brown, 'Female Book-Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of the Ninth-Century Prayerbooks', in *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Studies Presented to Jane Roberts*, ed. by Christian J. Kay and Louise M. Sylvester (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 45-67 (pp. 46-47).

³¹ See l. 11 in the 'Vita & passio sancte Cecilie virginis & martiris' in MS Laud misc. 108 in Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 490-96.

³² See also Acker, 'St Mildred in the *SEL*', p. 142.

saintly abbesses.

Edburga's 'bok of þe gospels' has a particularly symbolic meaning as a masculine item because of its subject matter and because it is a material object. The gospel book also makes Edburga distinct from the aforementioned example of Edith, who has the chalice, paten, and the Psalter book. Gospel books were of course in the possession of medieval nunneries. According to David N. Bell's research on the libraries of medieval nunneries, for example, the manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 155) owned by Barking Abbey, contains a Latin Bible, including four gospels. Barking Abbey is also considered to have owned Dionysius the Carthusian's Commentary on the gospels, which appears in the books listed in the copies of the will and inventory of William Pownsett, steward of the estates of the abbey.³³ The Convent of St Catherine of Siena in Edinburgh also owned Latin gospels.³⁴ Copies of the apocryphal gospel of Nichodemus in French were owned by the nunneries of Nuneaton, Barking, and Derby.³⁵ Although the copy is now lost, a gospel book which belonged to the Priory of St Mary in Higham, Kent is later described in the sixteenth-century inventory as 'a boke of gospels couered with siluer and ouer gilte with stones of cristall'.³⁶ Yet, given that those gospel books were, strictly speaking, owned by their nunneries rather than by the nuns themselves, the instances of women's personal ownership of gospels were likely to be rare.

One gospel book was apparently owned by a privileged woman of nobility and

³³ David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), p. 111 and pp. 116-20.

³⁴ Bell, *What Nuns Read*, p. 137.

³⁵ Bell, *What Nuns Read*, pp. 232-35.

³⁶ David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read*, pp. 142-43.

sanctity. Saint Margaret, Queen of Scotland, owned her gospel book (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. Liturg. f. 5). Margaret of Scotland, who lived slightly later than Edburga, in eleventh-century England and Scotland, was also from a West-Saxon royal family, descended from Alfred the Great. The description of Margaret's gospel book is strikingly similar to Edburga's, especially in Osbert's Latin *vita*. Both hagiographers depict the decoration of their books. Osbert of Clare describes Edburga's book of gospels:

Codex autem ille euangelicus de quo premisi superius, auro et argento furentibus per Angliam Danis exuitur, sed diuturno postmodum tempore ... claresceret nouo decore renuo restauratum (pp. 263-64).³⁷

While Osbert dismisses the secular ornaments that, earlier, Edburga did not choose as women's possessions, here, he illustrates how splendid her gospel book is, decorated with gold and silver. Similarly, the Latin hagiographer of Margaret describes her gospel book, gilt and bejewelled in binding, and illuminated inside with sumptuously historiated initials and pictures of the four evangelists.³⁸ The *vita* of Margaret contains a miracle story of her gospel book, commonly found in the *vitae* of Cuthbert and Columban, which is once dropped in the water but rediscovered undamaged.³⁹ Similarly, it is most interesting to note that Osbert also mentions the tribulations and restoration of the book during the Viking raids.

³⁷ 'That gospel-book of which I have already spoken was stripped of its gold and silver by the Danes who raged madly through England, but many years later ... it was skillfully restored to its former splendor.' English translation is taken from Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 102.

³⁸ Rebecca Rushforth, *Saint Margaret's Gospel-Book: The Favourite Book of an Eleventh-Century Queen of Scots* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2007), p. 11.

³⁹ Rushforth, *Saint Margaret's Gospel-Book*, pp. 11-14.

The gospels can be seen as books for clerics, while all the aforementioned examples of female saints describe the psalms and the Psalter books as their attributes. In the *SELS*, gospel books appear as men's possessions for preaching, owned by the early apostles and bishops. One of the male Winchester saints, Swithun, is said to have borne the teaching of the gospels in mind:

He þou3te on þat þe gospel seiþ þat me takeþ of lute hede,
 þat whoso deþ his dedes wiþ bost him tid non oþer mede,
 for he afongeþ here is mede wiþ þe dede anon.
 þat word is now for3ete among þe heize men echon (ll. 47-50).⁴⁰

The fact that Edburga's chosen book is a gospel book seems to distinguish her from other *SEL* abbess saints' in her reading practices, indicating that she has not only the feminine virtues of pious reading but also masculine authority of her own, symbolised by her priestly possessions.

Just as with the chalice, the materiality of this item differentiates the portrait of Edburga from other examples of pious female readers. None of the episodes of the young abbess's familiarity with reading involves books as material objects. Despite the fact that nuns spent most of their day reading and praying, the *SEL vitae* of abbesses rarely depict the physicality and materiality of books. This may reflect some aspects of medieval reading activities, which did not always require books as material objects and were often shared mnemonically with other brothers or sisters, especially at the elementary level of literacy.⁴¹ This is particularly true of the psalms; both

⁴⁰ All quotation from the *SEL vita* of Swithun are taken from Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 730-43.

⁴¹ On the earlier stages of literacy, or the ability to read, which was established phonetically and mnemonically rather than via books as physical objects, see Paul Saenger, 'Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages,' in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Roger Chartier, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge:

Frideswide and Mildred in the above-mentioned examples are said to have learnt and memorised the psalms. On the other hand, Edburga's book appears as an object, displayed as one of the gifts comparable to other materials such as gold, silver, and jewels. Soon after she gains a book of gospels, the hagiographer mentions the education of Edburga by emphasising her use of the book. Her father decides to educate her in how to read a book ('*in bok he lette hire lere*'; l. 38; emphasis added) and in a nunnery she is taught how to read by using a book ('*teche hire on þe bok*'; l. 40; emphasis added). The relative rarity of the appearance of books in the *vitae* of abbess saints suggests the authority of books as physical objects and underlines the significance of Edburga's acquisition of a gospel book.

The references to books in the *vita* of Edburga can be accounted for by the environment in which the Winchester nuns were living. Edburga's abbey, Nunnaminster, is known for nuns' ownership and production of books.⁴² There is an example later in the twelfth century which clearly indicates the existence of a female scribe in Winchester. The manuscript, MS Bodley 451, produced in Nunnaminster, unusually contains a reference to a female scribe in its colophon, although she does not provide further details about herself, stating only that the manuscript was produced by a 'scriptrix', a female scribe.⁴³ As mentioned earlier, the manuscript contains part

Polity, 1989), pp. 141-73 (p. 142); David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read*, p. 60 and 'What Nuns Read: The State of Questions', in *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 113-33 (pp. 119-20). See also Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and 'Aurality', in *Middle English, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. by Paul Strohm (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 68-85 (p. 69), for 'aurality', or 'shared hearing of written texts'.

⁴² On the scriptorium in Nunnaminster and its production of manuscripts, see Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*, pp. 171-85.

⁴³ P. R. Robinson, 'A Twelfth-Century *Scriptrix* from Nunnaminster', in *Of the Making of*

of the Latin *vita* of Edburga, her miracle of healing a blind woman and the beginning of the episode of her nightly secret vigils.⁴⁴ The appearance of books in her *vita* may lie behind the significant aspect of the cultural environment in Winchester that nuns were engaged in book production.

A prayer book, known as the Book of Nunnaminster (London, British Library, Harley MS 2965), is perhaps the most representative example of Anglo-Saxon books which were written for and read by women. The manuscript is believed to have been commissioned by Ealhswith, who founded Nunnaminster in the tenth century. The book had belonged to this nunnery since the foundation of Nunnaminster was completed by Edburga's father after her death.⁴⁵ Although female authorship is disputed, it seems clear that the book was produced for a female audience – Ealhswith and most probably the nuns at Nunnaminster, as the Latin prayers with feminine endings suggest.⁴⁶ It is therefore highly possible that Edburga had a chance to look at this book after she took the veil at Nunnaminster.

The Book of Nunnaminster consists of extracts from the gospels and a series of prayers. Its use as a prayer book is often discussed in relation to two Southumbrian prayer books, the Harley Prayer Book (London, British Library, Harley MS 7653) and

Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers: Essays Presented to M. B. Parkes, ed. by Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 73-93 (p. 74). See also Thomas N. Hall, 'Preaching at Winchester in the Early Twelfth Century', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 14.2 (2005), 189-216.

⁴⁴ Braswell, 'St Edburga of Winchester', p. 304; Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 28. On the text, see above n.2.

⁴⁵ N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 308-09.

⁴⁶ On the female authorship of the Book of Nunnaminster, see Birch, *An Ancient Manuscript of the Eighth or Ninth Century*, pp. 16-17; Browne, 'Female Book-Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 55-56.

the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ll.a.10), grouped together with the Book of Nunnaminster as the ‘Tiberius Group’.⁴⁷ Partly because of its significance in relation to the other two prayer books in the group, the Book of Nunnaminster is often regarded and categorised by modern scholars as a prayer book. Yet it is of particular note here that the Book of Nunnaminster contains three narratives, taken from the gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, on the Passion of Christ (fol. 1r-11r).⁴⁸ According to Helmut Gneuss, prayer books not only consist of prayers and psalms but usually contain passages from the gospels, just as the Book of Nunnaminster does. He also notes that the genre or sub-genre of a prayer book was not established in the Anglo-Saxon period, and that the content can vary in each copy.⁴⁹ While his categorisation, using Old English terminology, of ‘gospel-books’ indicates books containing complete copies of the four gospels which are extant today in fifty-nine copies and nineteen fragments, the Middle English words, ‘gospel bok’ or ‘bok of gospelles’, simply mean a book containing the gospels (*MED*).⁵⁰ It is therefore possible to call the Book of Nunnaminster ‘þe bok of þe gospels’ in Middle English.

A possible association between the Book of Nunnaminster, an actually existing

⁴⁷ Michelle P. Brown, ‘Female Book-Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England’, pp. 51-56; Barbara Raw, ‘Alfredian Piety: The Book of Nunnaminster’, in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Jane Roberts and Janet L. Nelson, with Malcolm Godden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 145-53.

⁴⁸ Birch, *An Ancient Manuscript of the Eighth or Ninth Century*, pp. 23-24; pp. 39-57.

⁴⁹ Helmut Gneuss, ‘Liturgical Books in Anglo-Saxon England and their Old English Terminology’, in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Lapidge and Gneuss, pp. 91-141 (pp. 137-38).

⁵⁰ Gneuss, ‘Liturgical Books in Anglo-Saxon England and their Old English Terminology’, pp. 106-9.

book, and Edburga's 'bok of þe gospels', a hagiographical and, to some extent, fictional object, has never been suggested. Although the original binding is lost, the Book of Nunnaminster also contains illuminated initials in various colours as well as images of the texts, which are comparable to the richness of Edburga's gospel book detailed in the Latin *vita*. More evidence is surely needed to make this identification, but at least, unlike the Latin *vita* written by Osbert, who, as a prior of Winchester, would have known both the Book of Nunnaminster and Edburga's gospel book, the lack of details of 'þe bok of þe gospels' in the *SEL vita* of Edburga enables us to make the connection between her book and the Book of Nunnaminster. In this reading, Edburga's gospel book can have been a gift inherited from the founders of Nunnaminster, namely her father and grandmother, which represents her status as a member of this royal family and a legitimate successor of theirs. Edburga's ownership of the gospel book was, then, not only personal but also institutional.

As the evidence of female ownership and authorship suggests, a female community in Winchester in the early Middle Ages was considered to be a highly educated literary community, which could be equal to male monastic communities. Although the *SEL vita* of Edburga states that she is taught how to read by an abbess called Æthelthryth (ll. 38-40), Edburga did not apparently develop her interest in spiritual learning after her consecration. Edburga, who is depicted with masculine, priestly objects, is then feminised in the rest of her *vita*. The narrative tells that her interest in spiritual learning is only used for a devotional purpose, rather than a scholarly one, like her grandfather Alfred's, or a clerical one, like her contemporary male bishop saints' in Winchester. Reading in monastic communities had two important purposes: scholastic *lectio* for learning and monastic *lectio* for prayers and

meditation.⁵¹ Both *lectiones* were considered equally important, but the latter is more often emphasised over the former in late medieval female religious communities. Instructive writings for female religious that include monastic rules relate that their reading is directly linked to praying.⁵² In the *SEL vita*, Edburga's literacy allows her to learn how to pray. The text focuses on illustrating how devout Edburga is after becoming a nun. One of the most representative episodes indicating her piety is her nightly visit to a chapel for her private prayers at vigils (ll. 73-80). When relating a number of episodes of Edburga's piety, the hagiographer makes his own comments on her meekness:

How mizte more meknesse ani man iseo
Oþer such womman as heo was mekere ani beo? (ll. 57-58)

As he mentions both 'man' and 'womman', it is clear that he focuses on her gender and connects her piety with her femininity. Edburga, first presented along with clerical authorities as having a chalice and a book of gospels, is gendered as feminine in this passage, reminding the audience of the icon of a pious woman reading and praying in the late medieval period.

⁵¹ Jean Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. by Catharine Misrahi, 2nd edn (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974; repr. 2009), pp. 72-73.

⁵² For example, the early thirteenth-century guide for anchoresses, *Ancrene Wisse*, states that 'Redunge is god bone. Redunge teacheð hu ant hwet me bidde, ant beode biȝet hit efter.' ('Reading is a good way of prayer. Reading teaches you how to pray, and for what, and prayer obtains it afterwards.') See IV: 1154-57 in Bella Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, EETS, OS 325 and 326, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For translation, see p. 109 in Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses: A Translation, based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009).

4. Male Saints in Winchester

After she takes the veil at Nunnaminster, founded by her father, Edburga's status is fashioned through references to bishops in Westminster. Medieval Winchester produced the cults of many male saints who were formerly bishops of Winchester, or who were translated to the town after their death. The *SELS* contain the *vitae* of those Winchester saints, such as Saints Swithun, Æthelwold, and Alphege, as well as Edburga. Although Saint Birinus, who was closely associated with Winchester, is a missionary from Italy, his *vita* is also included in the *SELS*. It is one of the characteristics particular to the legends of male saints that each *vita* contains references to other saints. The *SEL vitae* of Winchester saints have intertextual relationships by referring to and being referred to by other male saints' *vitae*. This cross-referencing is not, however, seen in the *vita* of Edburga. Although the *SEL vita* of Edburga mentions their names, such as 'Seint Swithan' (l. 22), to indicate the Old Minster where Alfred is buried, and 'Seint Aþelwold', the bishop who conducted Edburga's translation, Edburga's name is never mentioned in their legends. Yet the *SEL* hagiographer seems to situate her in this male homosocial network of the Winchester saints by referring to their names in her legend.

The Winchester saints included in the *SELS* lived and died between the seventh and tenth centuries. Although they cover several centuries, their cult was triggered mainly by their translation in the tenth century to the newly rebuilt Old Minster. Birinus is an early example of this group; he was a bishop of Dorchester in the seventh century and was translated to Winchester in 980.⁵³ Both Swithun, the ninth-century

⁵³ Yorke, 'Birinus [St Birinus] (d. c.650)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Online edn, October 2006

bishop of Winchester, and Edburga were translated by Æthelwold at nearly the same time: Swithun to the Old Minster in 971 and Edburga to Pershore sometime in the early 970s. Æthelwold and Alphege themselves were not celebrated as much as other saints, but rather they made efforts to create the cult of those earlier Winchester saints: Æthelwold, the tenth-century bishop of Winchester and vigorous reformer of the Benedictine Order, officiated at the translation of Birinus, Swithun, and Edburga, and launched the rebuilding of the Old Minster, where most of these Winchester saints, including Æthelwold himself, were buried.⁵⁴ Alphege followed Æthelwold's footsteps as his successor, by completing the Old Minster and conducting the translation of Æthelwold in 996.⁵⁵

Æthelwold is certainly a key to the making of those Winchester saints and their cults in the tenth century. In his career as a bishop of Winchester, Æthelwold was engaged in monastic reforms, such as the expulsion of corrupt clerics, institution of strict observation of a monastic rule, the *Regularis Concordia*, agreed at the Synod of Winchester, and the refoundation of monasteries in England.⁵⁶ He also played a significant role in producing and promoting the cults of English saints, not only local saints in Winchester but also those in various other places, such as Æthelthryth and

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/181>> [accessed 7 February 2014].

⁵⁴ Yorke, 'Æthelwold (904x9–984)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8920>> [accessed 7 February 2014]; Henrietta Leyser, 'Ælfheah (d. 1012)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/181>> [accessed 8 Feb 2014].

⁵⁵ Leyser, 'Ælfheah (d. 1012)', *ODNB*.

⁵⁶ Yorke, 'Æthelwold (904x9–984)', *ODNB*; Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom, eds, *Wulfstan of Winchester, 'The Life of St Æthelwold'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. xxxix–lx.

her female descendants.⁵⁷ Related to his foundation of monasteries, he promoted the cult of saints' relics through translation.⁵⁸ In Winchester, reconstruction of the Old Minster for translation of local saints was one of his greatest achievements in terms of inspiring veneration of local saints. Just as Æthelwold's reform of English churches and reintroduction of monasticism were influenced by the continent, rites of translation were also modelled on continental custom with advice from Warmar, an abbot of St Peter's from Ghent, and Lantfred, a monk of Fleury, both of whom experienced the translation of saints' relics to their churches in Europe, and he effectively linked translation to the veneration of English local saints.⁵⁹

In the *SELS*, the Legend of Æthelwold appears in five manuscripts with a variant text in MS B.⁶⁰ The *SEL vitae* refer to some of his achievements in terms of monastic reform. The *vitae* are particularly concerned with how Æthelwold reforms in Winchester, by expelling degenerate monks from the Old Minster and replacing them with monks from Abington, where he had formerly established a model Benedictine

⁵⁷ Yorke, 'Introduction', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. by Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1988), pp. 1-12 (p. 5).

⁵⁸ On the translation of English saints in which Æthelwold was involved, see Thacker, 'Æthelwold and Abingdon', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. by Yorke, pp. 43-64 (pp. 61-64).

⁵⁹ Lapidge and Winterbottom, eds, *Wulfstan of Winchester, 'The Life of St Æthelwold'*, pp. lix-lx; Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, pp. 8-12. For further discussions on the continental influence on Æthelwold, see Patrick Wormald, 'Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. by Yorke, pp. 13-42 (pp. 30-42).

⁶⁰ Five manuscripts are: MSS G, R, V, Qa, and Wa. See Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 185. On the MS B version of Æthelwold, see Diane Speed, 'Text and Meaning in the *South English Legendary Lives of Æthelwold*', *Notes and Queries*, 41.3 (1994), 295-301, and for the edited text, pp. 298-300.

community as an abbot.⁶¹ The major version of the Æthelwold *vita*, represented by MS Qa (London, British Library, Additional MS 10626), describes how a number of monasteries both for men and women were founded:

.viii. and .xl. abbeyes of monkes and of nonne
In Englonde þey rered with tresoure þat of persons was ywonne.
In þe toun of Wynchestre Seint Adelwold rered also
Anoper hous of blake monkes þat ȝut stondeþ boþe two;
Þe þridde hous he rered also þere of Seint Marie,
Of wemmen in relygioun, and made a nonnerie (ll. 73-78).⁶²

In this passage, ‘Seint Marie’ apparently refers to Nunnaminster. Æthelwold refounded Nunnaminster and enclosed it with walls between 964 and 971.⁶³ The reform of nunneries was also one of his missions, and he translated the *Rule of Saint Benedict* into Old English for the use of nuns, along with providing them with the Latin *Regularis Concordia*.⁶⁴ The text above is followed by a summary of his foundation of monasteries outside Winchester, in Peterborough, Ely, and Thorney (ll. 80-89). Although the *SEL vitae* of Æthelwold do not refer to his translation of the saints, Æthelwold as a conductor of translation often appears in other legends of saints in the *SELS*.

The Legend of Swithun contains detailed accounts of his translation. The translation of Swithun is one of the most representative achievements of Æthelwold,

⁶¹ On a model Benedictine community in Abington, see Yorke, ‘Æthelwold (904x9–984)’, *ODNB*; Thacker, ‘Æthelwold and Abingdon’, pp. 43-64.

⁶² All quotation from the Additional 10626 version of Æthelwold is taken from ‘Appendix C: The Middle English “Life of Adelwolde”’, in *Wulfstan of Winchester, ‘The Life of St Æthelwold’*, ed. by Lapidge and Winterbottom, pp. 87-92.

⁶³ Yorke, ‘Æthelwold (904x9–984)’, *ODNB*.

⁶⁴ Yorke, ‘Introduction’, in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, p. 6.

along with the reconstruction of the Old Minster. Old Minster is frequently mentioned in the *SEL vitae* of Winchester saints, with reference to the translation of Swithun, such as ‘þe minstre of Seint Swithan’ (the *vita* of Edburga, l. 22), ‘Of Seint Swythyn þe hous’ (the *vita* of St Æthelwold, l. 57), and ‘þe priorie of Seint Swythyn’ (the *vita* of Æthelwold, l. 59). It was during the reign of King Edgar, when Æthelwold was the tenth bishop of Winchester. The people in Winchester decide to transfer Swithun’s body to a more appropriate place inside the church, which the *SEL* hagiographer thinks was a good choice of time for Swithun’s translation, because they had both a good king and a good bishop at the same time:

Edgar was þe niþe king þat after Apelbert com.
 þat king was þulke time þat Seint Swiþhan þe deþ nom.
 Þe bischop þat was of Winchestre þo king Edgar was king
 þo Seint Apelwold was holde god þorw alle þing,
 þe teþe bischop he was þere þat after Swiþhan com;
 þe king of Seint Donston and of him mucche is rede nom.
 Seint Swiþhan þis holi mon a god time gan biseo
 þo god king was and god bischop schrined forte beo (ll. 89-96).⁶⁵

After the passages typical of the *SEL vita* of Swithun, which provide detailed accounts of the succession of kings and bishops noted above, the *SEL* hagiographer tells a vision of Swithun that appears to a man. In this vision, Swithun not only requests his translation, but tells the man to go to the Old Minster first and meet Æthelwold (‘to Winchestre go to þe Olde Munstre þer þou schalt ifinde / þe gode Bischof Apelwold þat þe teþe is after me.’; the *vita* of Swithun, ll. 100-01). In the descriptions of Swithun’s translation followed by this vision, Æthelwold is

⁶⁵ All quotations from the *SEL vita* of Swithun are taken from Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, pp. 730-42.

continuously presented as a central figure in the celebration of Swithun, along with King Edgar.

Although it is not as detailed as Swithun's, the *SEL vita* of Edburga also contains a description of translation. While the *translatio* of Æthelthryth is narrated as part of her miracles, or the posthumous discovery of her incorrupt body, the *translatio* of Edburga provides descriptions of how her translation was conducted, and information about the resting places of Edburga's relics, with specific names of people and places. As in the case of Swithun, Æthelwold is part of the story, who takes the initiative in her translation.

Mani is þe vair miracle, þat God haþ vor hire wrouȝt.
Hit befel þer afterward þat Seint Apelwold
Bischoþ was of Winchestre, as þe bok us haþ told.
Þe abbesse Alkine þat was þo and þis bischoþ also
Let nime up þis holi bodi and in schrine ido (ll. 102-06).

The *vita* also records the name of the abbess in Nunnaminster as well as Æthelwold. Edburga's bones were taken up by Æthelwold and Abbess Alfghena of Nunnaminster in order to transfer to her new shrine and the abbey of Pershore:

Þe abbesse solde hir scolle to þe abbeize of Pershore
Vor þe erl þat began þat house an hundred pound ȝaf þefore (ll. 107-08).

From this passage, her translation was certainly agreed to by both the bishop and abbess of Winchester. Although there are a number of narratives of unfair translation in the Middle Ages, this was apparently a legitimate translation rather than a *furta sacra*.⁶⁶ Also, it reveals that her translation involved exchange of money. In her

⁶⁶ On the *furta sacra* and the translation of Edburga, see Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 133-34.

translation, her skull was exchanged for a hundred pounds. Medieval saints, especially their relics, often played a significant role in fund-raising for churches and communities.⁶⁷ As William of Malmesbury states in *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, Nunnaminster was not a rich nunnery at the time, and Æthelwold was entrusted to the refoundation of this small monastery, which was more or less in ruins (ii. 78. 2).⁶⁸ It is also possible that selling Edburga's relics for money was one of Æthelwold's reforms in Nunnaminster intended to overcome the financial difficulties the nunnery was in.

The translation of Edburga has more elements that differ from Swithun's, since she was translated to an unfamiliar place for the trade in relics. Yet, among a number of local Winchester saints, it is Swithun with whom Edburga is often compared in the history of her cult, because of their translation. Although Swithun, who died in 863, and Edburga, who lived in the first half of the tenth century (921x4-951x3), never met during their lifetimes, their cults overlap due to their translations in the tenth century, both of which were officiated by Æthelwold. Ridyard emphasises the presence of Swithun in her discussion of the cult of Edburga in Winchester. According to Ridyard, Edburga had an important role as 'dual patron' of Winchester together with Swithun, but this relationship gradually degenerated into rivalry and competition.⁶⁹ Although

⁶⁷ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 24.

⁶⁸ M. Winterbottom, ed. and trans., with the assistance of R. M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Pontificum Anglorum: 'The History of the English Bishops', Volume One: Text and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). See also, Foot, *Veiled Women II*, p. 245; Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, p. 88.

⁶⁹ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 108-14. See also Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Women's Monasteries and Sacred Space: The Promotion of Saints' Cults and Miracles', in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspective*, ed. by Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 80-81.

the *SEL vita* does not retain such details, an episode of the translation of Edburga in fact bears striking similarities with the *translatio* of Swithun, and the legend of Edburga is somewhat based on his legend. Both saints were first buried in obscure places outside the church and after several years, both saints appear to their brother monks and sister nuns and request re-burial, or translation to more worthy places inside the church.⁷⁰ Given that the translations of both saints were carried out by Æthelwold, who intended to revive the cult of saints through translation, comparison and competition between Swithun and Edburga were designed by this bishop in tenth-century Winchester. As historical and ecclesiastical backgrounds in Winchester, as well as the textual references in the *SEL vita*, show, Edburga is placed in the web of male clerical saints of Winchester.

5. Women's Religious Status

The Legend of Edburga suggests various aspects of the status of medieval women who possessed and exercised public power. The construction of the *SEL* Anglo-Saxon women's status, including Edburga, is not similar to that of late medieval religious women, and as discussed in the previous section, it was rather influenced by male religious status. It is often suggested that women's religious status is different from men's status, because their piety was not based on structure or hierarchy. For example, Newman notes that holy men were classified according to their professions, while 'holy women formed a class unto themselves'.⁷¹ Furthermore, Bynum points out the

⁷⁰ See Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 104-05.

⁷¹ Newman, 'Flaws in the Golden Bowl', p. 123.

‘structureless’ nature of medieval women’s religious lives; in other words, religious women, including female saints, did not have the secure structures in their lives that men did, because for women, whether they belonged to institutions or not, it was only being religious that was important. Therefore, in Bynum’s opinion, female saints in the late Middle Ages can hardly be classified as having any clear religious status.⁷²

In considering the status of Anglo-Saxon abbesses, however, it is difficult to apply those ideas about religious women. First, Bynum’s arguments are mainly based on continental religious women, especially beguines, who were known for not having their own institutions or rules but for living only according to the vow of celibacy.⁷³ Bynum also includes a few late medieval English visionaries, such as Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, in her discussions, neither of whom belonged to specific institutions: Margery, like beguines, was a laywoman who made a vow of celibacy; and Julian, as an anchoress, even though physically belonging to a cell attached to a church, lived autonomously and had the opportunity to contact the outside world regardless of her religious status. These women did not strictly have a religious status as early medieval English nuns or abbesses did; instead, their religious status was rather more flexible and fluid, flowing between secular and religious lives.

Also, these examples of religious women place much emphasis on their feminine characteristics. Although it is noted elsewhere that the existence of male figures was important for these religious women as their spiritual guides, counsellors, and biographers, studies of women’s piety have often emphasised women’s qualities, such as affectivity and corporeality, including bearing and raising of children, which are

⁷² Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 46-47.

⁷³ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 46-47.

traditionally regarded as 'feminine'.⁷⁴ These views of religious women's status could also give an impression that their representations are made up of almost exclusively feminine elements. Their mystic visions, which can also be seen as 'feminine', make them more individual and charismatic.

Regarding the depictions of medieval religious women who were charismatic and individual in the *SELS*, female royal saints and abbesses in the Anglo-Saxon period could have charismatic characters, such as Hild, but they were not individual because they belonged to institutions and were supposed to live in communities. The *SELS* depict female saints as nuns and abbesses belonging to their religious communities and also, as in the *vitae* of Mildred and Edburga, sometimes illustrate how female saints get along with their spiritual fellows. As for the emphasis on female characteristics – Anglo-Saxon female saints could be seen as more masculine. In the early Middle Ages, as Carol J. Clover argues, 'outstanding' and 'exceptional' women such as queens and abbesses are rather closer to the category of privileged men than to the other category, including most women, children, slaves, the old, disabled, and disenfranchised men.⁷⁵ Male figures were also important to the construction of Anglo-Saxon female saints. The status of holy women, such as royal saints and abbess saints, did not exist in itself, without men's interference; rather, it was more or less influenced by the structure of male society, both secular and religious. Anglo-Saxon female saints were also dependent on male authorities, not only in society but also in their texts.

While their historical status could sometimes be more masculine, their

⁷⁴ L'Estrange and More, *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe*, p.4.

⁷⁵ Carol J. Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Speculum*, 68.2 (1993), 363-87 (p. 380).

hagiographical representations were often feminised in the late medieval period, as is seen in the earlier example of Edburga who piously reads and prays. In this respect, Bynum is right in saying that in the process of being written into hagiography, medieval female religious are gendered, or more accurately, feminised, along with emphasis on their feminine qualities.⁷⁶ Even though Anglo-Saxon holy abbesses are more likely to be sorted into the 'masculine' category, their late medieval representations could have been rewritten and modelled on late medieval religious women on the continent. The existence of such religious women, especially the continental visionaries and mystics, were known in England through Middle English translations in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as those of Mechtild of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great, Marguerite Porete, Elizabeth of Hungary, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d'Oignes.⁷⁷ Some texts were circulated in manuscripts but only in limited communities, such as convents of nuns, while others received wider readership. Margery Kempe is one of the readers of these continental women's religious writings. In the *Book of Margery Kempe*, 'Bride's book', or the writings of Bridget of Sweden, perhaps her *Liber Celestis*, appears three times (ll. 1257-58; 1230-31; 4819-20).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See also Bynum, 'Foreword' to *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. by Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. ix-xi (p. x).

⁷⁷ The writings of the first six appear in Alexandra Barratt, ed., *Women's Writing in Middle English* (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 49-107; the *vitae* of the last three women are edited in Jennifer N. Browne, *Three Women of Liège*. See also Barratt, 'Continental Women Mystics and English Readers', in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. by Dinshaw and Wallace, pp. 240-55.

⁷⁸ See also Wallace, *Strong Women: Life, Text, and Territory 1347-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 86-88.

Elizabeth of Hungary's *Revelations* could have been known to Margery Kempe.⁷⁹ Later, the writings of Elizabeth of Hungary and Catherine of Siena were printed by Wynkyn de Worde in the early sixteenth century.⁸⁰ Although those women lived a few centuries after the Anglo-Saxon abbesses, and their original writings were produced earlier than the *SELS*, their texts were translated into Middle English around the fifteenth century, which is near contemporaneous with some of the *SEL* manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon abbess saints, such as MSS B and V. Of course, the *SEL* hagiographers could have known the examples of continental religious women through Latin sources, but given that they share a similar audience that had known of the existence of those women through Middle English translation, it is possible that the *SEL vitae* of religious women in England might have been, or would have been, expected to have been more or less influenced by the representations of those continental religious women. Considering these influences, the representations of early medieval female saints in the *SELS* are made up of a mixture of masculine authority and feminine piety.

In the Middle Ages, there was a shift in the concepts of female sainthood from public to private sanctity. In her discussion of Anglo-Saxon female saints, historian, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg argues that in the earlier Middle Ages, female sanctity was generally limited to those who had high social, political, and economic status. Those

⁷⁹ Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, p. 71. Although there are many elements which Margery and Elizabeth of Hungary have in common, the treatise of St Elizabeth mentioned in the Book of Margery Kempe (ll. 5173-74) is also argued to refer to that of Elizabeth of Töss, great-niece of Elizabeth of Hungary. See Roger Ellis, 'Margery Kempe's Scribe and the Miraculous Books', in *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey*, ed. by Helen Phillips (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), pp. 161-75 (pp. 164-68). See also Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing*, p. 87.

⁸⁰ Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, p. 72 and pp. 95-97.

female saints were more often celebrated for their public and exterior achievements than for their private and interior experiences. As virtues balanced both for private and public became encouraged, the interior experiences, such as mystical and charismatic spirituality, gradually became more important than before for female religious in the later Middle Ages.⁸¹ Anglo-Saxon female saints provide one of the earlier examples of powerful women who were celebrated as saints for their public performance.

In Anglo-Saxon England, various noble women emerged and exercised their power as queens.⁸² Although these queens were not always recognised as saints, they enjoyed exceptional power both in society and in the Church. They were particularly strong in the ecclesiastical realms, through various activities, such as supporting churches and monastic movements as patrons and managing monasteries as abbesses themselves.⁸³ There are a number of queens involved in monastic reforms in the tenth century, including Eadgifu, third wife of Edward the Elder and mother of Edburga, who supported Dunstan and Æthelowld as their close friend.⁸⁴ Although all the *SEL* insular female saints, except for Æthelthryth, never married and thus did not possess the power of queenship, those holy nuns from royal families can also be considered as typical examples of women who had both public and private power. They could not seek further power brought by marriage to kings, but they could still retain power and authority from their royal background and inherited wealth.

⁸¹ Schulenburg, 'Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles', pp. 104-05.

⁸² See Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066', *Past and Present*, 9 (1981), 3-27.

⁸³ See Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, p. 120-27.

⁸⁴ On the women's involvements in Benedictine reform, see Meyer, 'Women and the Tenth Century English Monastic Reform'. On Eadgifu, see Meyer, 'Women and the Tenth Century English Monastic Reform', pp. 38-39; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, p. 120 and pp. 124-27.

The inheritance of property was particularly significant to those unmarried royal saints such as Edburga. Anglo-Saxon charters often present pictures of historical women with power in descriptions of the transferal of their property. There remains a document which suggests Edburga's possession of public power. The charter issued in 939 describes that her half-brother, Æthelstan, grants her his land in Droxford in Hampshire.⁸⁵ According to M. A. Meyer, the possession of landed property meant wealth, power, and influence in Anglo-Saxon England. Successful monasteries were supported by royal patronage, especially by their patrons' grants of and controls over the given property.⁸⁶ Also, as Schulenburg argues, such women with property were often encouraged to get involved in central monastic activities, such as helping missionaries, founding churches and monasteries, and education, by assuming their own leadership.⁸⁷ As we saw in the example of Domne Eafe in Chapter 3, this can often be observed in the foundation stories of Anglo-Saxon royal abbesses and their nunneries. Ealhswith, grandmother of Edburga and founder of Nunnaminster, is also one of those women with property. The Book of Nunnaminster contains passages about the boundaries of Ealhswith's property in Winchester with detailed geographical information, written in Old English (f. 40v).⁸⁸

In the *SEL vita*, Edburga's public power is indicated by her inheritance of her father's land. When she becomes a nun, Edburga enters Nunnaminster with her

⁸⁵ Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Whiting and Company, 1885), pp. 459-461; Meyer, 'Patronage of West Saxon Nunneries in Late Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 347-48.

⁸⁶ Meyer, 'Patronage of the West Saxon Royal Nunneries in Late Anglo-Saxon England', p. 334.

⁸⁷ Schulenburg, 'Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles', p. 121

⁸⁸ See Birch, *An Ancient Manuscript of the Eighth or Ninth Century*, pp. 32-33 and p. 96.

father's property. Her father not only makes her a nun, but also grants her his land and remaining fortune:

Hire fader hire made none þer, as hire herte to drow,
And mucche lond 3af in wiþ hire and oþer richesse inow (ll. 43-44).

The land property described above is considered as a dowry to her nunnery. While the chalice and book are symbols of her royal lineage and quasi-priestly authority, her father's gift of property is more directly linked to power, securing her status at Nunnaminster. Not only does it indicate the owner's secular wealth, but it strengthens her power inside monastic community. As for Edburga, her royal background provides her with power even after she has renounced the world just like the other abbesses. The objects and property, which Edburga is given by her father and her family, shape and secure her religious status in Winchester. Even though Edburga is not the founder of her abbey, like her grandmother, this passage clearly indicates that she is certainly one of the more powerful women of property in Anglo-Saxon England, just like other unmarried abbess saints in the *SELS*.

By inheriting property, as Anglo-Saxon royal women enter monasteries they establish their status within the cloisters. The comparison with male monastic saints provides insight into the way in which powerful Anglo-Saxon women such as Edburga build up their monastic status. The *SELS* include a number of male clerical saints, whose *vitae* are mainly concerned with how they rise to the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Legend of Alphege, who was Bishop of Winchester as a successor of Æthelwold in the tenth and eleventh centuries, is a typical success story as a medieval cleric and more generally as a Christian in the Middle Ages. His narrative begins with his abandonment of his noble family. He becomes a monk and learns the monastic rules in the town of Gloucestershire; then he leads the life of a hermit in Bath; he goes

on to found a Benedictine house as an abbot; following a vision of St Andrew's visit to Dunstan, Alphege is appointed to bishop of Winchester; after twenty-two years' service at Winchester, Alphege is chosen as Archbishop of Canterbury. The Legend of Alphege ends with his martyrdom after persecutions by the Danes.⁸⁹ Alphege not only reaches the highest clerical position in England, but he finally becomes a martyr, the loftiest status that any devout Christian could reach.

The images of clerical hierarchy are also observed in the *vita* of Swithun. The *vita* similarly deals with his promotion from monk to priest, and then to bishop. When he is appointed as a priest, the hagiographer explains his promotion as follows:

Seint Swiþhan he [Helman, the bishop of Winchester] made prest as he
 dude oþer mo,
 so þat from on order to oþer Seint Swiþhan prest bicom (ll. 16-17).

The phrase 'on order to oþer' sounds as if once they get on the prepared route, they are promoted and progress almost automatically, just like Swithun himself.

The *SEL vita* of Swithun also seems interested in describing a history of kings and bishops in Winchester, by giving detailed accounts of the order of their succession. The hagiographer often inserts passages concerning the deaths and successions of the kings in parallel with narrating Swithun's holy life. For example, when the translation of Swithun is decided, the hagiographer explains that this was during of King Edgar and Bishop Æthelwold, using specific ordinal numbers, such as 'þe niþe king...after Aþelbert' (l. 89) and 'þe teþe bischop...after Swiþhan' (l. 93). The same phrase is repeated by Swithun himself, in his vision, referring to Æthelwold as the tenth bishop after him ('gode Bischoþ Aþelwold þat þe teþe after me'; l. 101). Along with

⁸⁹ On the *SEL vita* of Alphege, see D'Evelyn and Mill eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 148-55.

hierarchal order, both secular and ecclesiastical, these expressions indicate the hagiographer's intention to emphasise royal and ecclesiastical genealogy in Winchester in his *vita*, perhaps in order to give dates and so confer historical veracity on the narrative of this most probably fictive saint. More importantly, it suggests that changes in status in male society, both secular and religious, were strictly based on hierarchy, progressing from one order to another.

In the *SEL vitae* of monastic women, the process of becoming a nun is clearly depicted. Both *vitae* of Æthelthryth and Winifred illustrate how they take the veil ('abit'; l. 22 in Æthelthryth; 'abyte'; l. 63 in Winifred) and become nuns. Æthelthryth is described as having been made a nun by Bishop Wolfray. The *vita* of Edburga also describes that she was made a nun by her father ('Hire fader hire made nonne'; l. 43), which is different from the abovementioned two abbesses. The involvement of her father, Edward the Elder, in Edburga's consecration also serves to highlight Nunnaminster as her family foundation. In each *vita*, the scene of consecration is symbolically told, often with miracles, such as their early inclination and dedication to the spiritual life. In Edburga's case, she enters a nunnery, after which there follows the symbolic episode of her choice of the two holy items.

Although becoming a nun is apparently more important than being appointed abbess, the two *vitae* of the *SEL* abbess saints do nevertheless illustrate how they become abbesses. In the *vita* of Mildred, the scene of her appointment, 'fit abba' as written in a Latin gloss, is depicted along with such details as who made her an abbess:

Erchebischof of Cantelburi Theodor was þo
 Of Seint Mildrede he herde telle as well as oþer mo.
 Abbesse he made hire of þe house as heo was wurþe ich wene
 Nonnen þer were vnder hire sixti and tene (ll. 141-44).

The *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth also describes briefly that she was appointed a year after

she entered the convent of Ely ('Abbesse heo was hire self imad after þe furste zere', l. 25). The *SEL vitae* of monastic women saints do not place more emphasis on the hierarchy within nunneries than in the orders of male bishop saints, but these scenes in which they become abbesses significantly reinforce their status through abbatial authority.

Having firmly established her secular and monastic status, it is one of the distinct characteristics of the *vita* of Edburga that her authoritative status is almost negated by the saint herself in a number of episodes within the cloisters. As seen in Chapter 3, royal sainthood is a typical form of sainthood in the *vitae* of medieval saints. Although it is underwritten by her importance as the king's daughter, the Latin *vita* of Edburga by Osbert of Clare is more concerned with illustrating Edburga's renunciation of the secular world and realisation of monastic ideals through her practice of *patientia* and *humilitas*.⁹⁰ The latter part of the *SEL vita* of Edburga also focuses on various episodes that tell of her patience and humility despite her nobility. The sanctity embodied in Edburga is similar to that of the thirteenth-century saint, Elizabeth of Hungary. The Life of Elizabeth of Hungary shares motifs with the *vita* of Edburga, such as her possession of a book from an early age (although in Elizabeth's case it is a Psalter book) and her secret visit to a chapel at night, and her willingness to take on menial labours. In the *SEL vita* of Edburga, the hagiographer lists a number of episodes demonstrating her virtue of humility, and one of the most representative stories relates Edburga's custom of cleaning the other sisters' shoes in the kitchen while they are asleep:

A niȝt heo wolde stilleliche, whan hi were alle aslepe,

⁹⁰ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 96-103.

Heore alre schon vrom bed to bed bringe to one hepe,
 And beren hem to þe kuchene adoun and clene hem and wipe þere,
 And wasshen and smerie ek þilke þat need were,
 And to here beddes stilleliche bere hem aȝen also.
 Þis heo wolde bi cotume niȝt after oþer do,
 Alwei euele hire kunde it was, such dede forto do:
 Þe kinges douȝter of Englonde to smeri oþeres schon (ll. 49-56).

Like Edburga, Elizabeth, who is a daughter of the king of Hungary and wife of the landgrave of Thuringia, voluntarily engages in menial work in the kitchen instead of her handmaids. Osbern Bokenham states in his *Life of St Elizabeth of Hungary*:

She dysshys in þe kechyn ful oftyn also
 Wolde wasshyn & wypyn; to exclude lettyng,
 Hyr maydyns she sent oþir thyngys to do
 In þe mene tyme of þis doying (ll. 10353-56).⁹¹

Since activities such as washing clothes and dishes, are everyday chores, often regarded as women's work, it is possible that Edburga's behavior represents a feminine virtue, even though she does not marry or enter a domestic household. Women's charitable activity provides them with ways of pursuing active public lives. Their voluntary labours demonstrate one of the two important sides of pious life: active piety, in contrast to contemplative piety. Along with the subsequence episode depicting Edburga's custom of praying at night, the narrative as a whole represents the realisation of the mixed life in Edburga. It is more important, however, to note that princesses such as Elizabeth of Hungary and Edburga engage in this work for other people. The *SEL* narrator emphatically reminds his audience of the fact that she is 'þe kinges douhter of Englonde', who was not supposed to do such work even for herself.

⁹¹ The *vita* in *Gilte Legende* also includes this episode. See ll. 197-203, in Hammer, ed., *Gilte Legende*, II, pp. 843-54; Delany, trans., *A Legend of Holy Women*, p. 181.

In both cases, their status of nobility makes their humble acts more distinctive.

Edburga's humility is further emphasised in an episode of her miracles. While celebrating her everyday virtues, the *SEL* hagiographer also tells of Edburga's extraordinary performance of miracles. However, even though the miracles that Edburga works could allow the *SEL* hagiographer to present her as a charismatic figure, he does not apparently choose to do so. For example, when one of her miracles, healing the sick with the water in which she washes her hands, becomes widely known to the people, Edburga at first seems to gain fame as a miracle-worker, but then tries to avoid public attention:

Hit of þouȝte þis maide sore þat me spak þer of so wide;
Perfore heo wesch hire honden selde bote someware þer bside,
Pat nomon scholde it seo ne bere er of nouȝt,
Laste it were to wyde couþ and to wide aboute ibrouȝt (ll. 65-68).

These passages again serve to highlight Edburga's humility and meekness. It is of note that as the narrative goes on to further stress Edburga's everyday virtues, her power and authority are emphasised less. Edburga's virtue of humility, presented here, surpasses her gender. Humility is a gender-neutral virtue, but it is demonstrated better by people of higher status. The episode of Edburga cleaning her sisters' shoes is also reminiscent of the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet (John 13:1-17). Again, the *SEL* hagiographer stresses her virtuous attitude, which is imitable by every Christian, rather than her extraordinary ability. This is not a process of gendering because, even though it is flavoured by her gender, humility is not only encouraged as a woman's virtue, but as a virtue for both sexes, as it is praised, for instance, throughout the *SEL* *vita* of Swithun. While the first part of the *vita* of Edburga depicts her royal background as one of the examples of Anglo-Saxon women to possess power,

the representations of Edburga in the second half of the narrative stress her imitable virtues such as humility and meekness rather than her authoritative status.

6. The *SELS* and the Cult of Edburga in and outside Winchester

Along with the male royal and clerical authority figures, Anglo-Saxon Winchester also has authority in its past and location. The city of Winchester has a particular significance in the *SELS*. The *SELS*'s inclusion of a relatively large number of saints from Winchester is one of their distinct characteristics. As mentioned earlier, apart from Swithun and Alphege, whose *vitae* appear in other collections of Middle English hagiography, such as *Gilte Legende* and Caxton's translation of the *Golden Legend*, the Middle English legends of Æthelwold and Birinus as well as Edburga, are uniquely found in the *SELS*.⁹² The importance of Winchester in the *SELS* is not simply explained by the fact that the city produced a number of saints who had their resting places there, but that Winchester played an important role in providing this post-Conquest collection of saints' legends with authorities from the Anglo-Saxon past. According to Ridyard, ninth- and tenth-century Winchester was the principal *ciuitas regia* of Anglo-Saxon England.⁹³ Even after the Norman Conquest, Winchester remained as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon England and the authoritative 'English' past. Interest in the Anglo-Saxon period is prominent throughout the *SELS*, as is shown by many *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon saints. The inclusion of a group of the saints of Winchester in some *SEL* manuscripts serves to establish a link between Anglo-Saxon and post-

⁹² D'Evelyn and Foster, 'Saints' Legends', p. 572, p. 565, pp. 584-85, and p. 624.

⁹³ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 116.

Conquest England.

Anglo-Saxon Winchester also had an impact on the *SELS* in terms of their vernacularity. Although the idea has subsequently been questioned, Winchester was once nominated as the place where ‘Standard Old English’ originated, because of its development of English vernacular culture.⁹⁴ Two major events related to the rise of vernacular literary culture happened in ninth and tenth-century Winchester. First, there was Alfred’s cultural, scholarly and educational translation programme in the ninth century. Alfred’s literary circle promoted vernacular literary, namely English, through his own translation works. Second, there was Æthelwold’s religious and political reform of the Benedictine order in the tenth century. Æthelwold translated the Rule of Saint Benedict into Old English, as one of his reforms of the English church. He also educated his predecessors in the Winchester school, one of the most famous of whom was Ælfric, who compiled the huge collection of saints’ legends in Old English.⁹⁵ As discussed above, both Alfred and Æthelwold are significant in the cult of Edburga: Alfred provided Edburga with royal authority, and Æthelwold produced her cult in Winchester and also transmitted it to other places in England. Both names appear in the *SEL vita* of Edburga and they are part of her narrative. Although the hagiographer focuses on their achievements, as a king in Alfred and as a bishop in Æthelwold, their literary legacy seems to have been inherited in the *SELS* themselves in terms of their promotion of English writings. The choice of language suggests that the *SEL*

⁹⁴ Lapidge, ‘Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher’, in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. by Yorke, pp. 89-117 (p. 109). On Winchester as the origin of ‘Standard Old English’, see Gneuss, ‘The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold’s School at Winchester’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1 (1972), 63-83.

⁹⁵ Gneuss, ‘The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold’s School at Winchester’, pp. 63-75.

hagiographers had a mission in common with these Anglo-Saxon English scholars to write in English for their nation.

Not only Winchester, but, in the case of Edburga, cult places outside Winchester are important, as they suggest how the *SELS* were developed. As well as her identity as a saint of Winchester, the appearance of Edburga in the *SELS* is closely related to her posthumous translation from Winchester. The cult of Edburga spread outside of Winchester through the dissemination of her relics after the translation. As mentioned earlier, Æthelwold played a significant role in promoting the cult of saints in Winchester by translating their relics to Winchester. It was also Æthelwold who exported Edburga's relics from Winchester. Although the eleventh-century list of saints' resting places written in Old English, *Secgan be þam Godes sanctum þe on Engla lande ærost reston*, only Nunnaminster is indicated as Edburga's resting place ('Ðonne restað sancta Eadburh on nunnan mynstre'; l. 33), it is also recorded in other post-Conquest hagiographic documents that some of her relics were posthumously transferred to Pershore.⁹⁶

The cult of Edburga in Pershore is particularly important as it led to the production of hagiographic writings about Edburga. Osbert of Clare's *vita* was primarily written for the monks in Pershore, as he describes.⁹⁷ The cult in Pershore is also a possible reason for the inclusion of Edburga's *vita* in the *SELS*. Through the trade of the saint's relics, the cult of Edburga is spread to the southwest, especially Worcestershire with Pershore as a new cult centre.⁹⁸ The *SELS*, which are often argued to have originated

⁹⁶ F. Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands*, p. 15. See also Rollason, 'Lists of Saints' Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 7 (1978), 61-93.

⁹⁷ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 19.

⁹⁸ On the cult of Edburga in Pershore, see Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*,

from Worcester, are thus geographically close to the place where her cult is localised.⁹⁹ Moreover, the so-called ‘E’ reduction of the *SELS*, which includes the *vita* of Edburga, characteristically contains saints locally celebrated in Worcestershire.¹⁰⁰ In terms of the provenance of the manuscripts, as Görlach notes, the two surviving *SEL* manuscripts from the ‘E’ branch, MSS E and V, share some features of their dialect from Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, whereas MS E has characteristics of the North Hampshire dialect, which is rather closer to Winchester.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Edburga has twofold significance in the *SELS*: first, as one of the Winchester saints to represent Anglo-Saxon England; second, as a local saint from the place where the *SELS* were produced.

The *SEL* hagiographer also continues to describe that there is a third cult place of Edburga, following after Winchester and Pershore:

So þat þe abbeizē of Perschore of Seint Eadborw is,
 And þe nonnerie of Winchestre ek, þer heo was none iwis,
 And Burcestre þer biside Oxneford þre canones beþ
 Of Seint Ædborw hii beþ all þreo, as men al day seþ (ll. 109-112).

All these details of the translation of Edburga and the subsequent cult outside Winchester, however, have sometimes been questioned. Ridyard argues that the saint called Edburga, who was translated to Pershore and was venerated in Pershore and

pp. 129-39.

⁹⁹ Braswell, ‘Saint Edburga of Winchester’, p. 292 and p. 296.

¹⁰⁰ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, p. 55.

¹⁰¹ Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, p.81 for Egerton 1993, pp. 102-3 for MS V, and p. 76 for MS B. Major, ‘Saint Etheldreda in the *SEL*’, p. 96. Similarly, Major points out, drawing on *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, that MS E originated in Gloucester, and that the Vernon Manuscript came from northwest Worcester; while MS B has characteristics seen further south in Hampshire.

Bincester, is not actually Edburga of Winchester, but has most probably been confused with a different local saint with the same name.¹⁰² However, even if it were historically inaccurate, the confusion of a saint's identity is often seen in saints' cults, and these mistakes were sometimes rather willingly accepted at the time for the promotion of the saints and their resting-places. It is therefore still of note that the three cult places of Edburga which the hagiographer lists – Winchester, Pershore, and Bincester – suggest how her cult spread outside Winchester. It also gives a picture of Edburga's cult, which is made up of various localities by telling of the afterlives of this saint.

The *SEL* version of Edburga reflects various aspects more typical of royal female saints in the Anglo-Saxon period, whose status was built upon their relationships with masculine authorities. They possessed and exercised institutional power, unlike virgin martyrs who often resisted institutional authority. In the case of Edburga, the *SEL* hagiographer emphasises the importance of her royal lineage and religious background in Winchester. Her earthly family, especially her grandfather, King Alfred, and her father, Edward the Elder, plays a significant role in shaping her royal identity. The episode of the young Edburga's choice of chalice and book, and especially the significance of books appearing in the narrative, as represented by the Book of Nunnaminster, indicate her legitimate inheritance of one of the West-Saxon foundations of royal nunneries. After she entered the religious community, her status as an abbess and eventually as one of the local saints was established in relationships with other, male saints in Winchester. The construction of Edburga's status is different

¹⁰² Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 129-39; and Foot, *Veiled Women II*, p. 135.

from those of continental religious women, partly because she is one of the earlier examples of medieval women who could enjoy the possession of power in Anglo-Saxon England. Although the hagiographer does not entirely focus on presenting her as a powerful woman throughout the narrative, the fourteenth and fifteenth-century *SEL vita* still retains an image of early women with institutional power. The *SEL vita* of Edburga shows that masculine authority, derived from the saint's family and institution, is important in the construction of her status. The inclusion of Edburga and other local saints in Winchester also suggests the importance of this city as a symbol of the Anglo-Saxon, or English, authoritative past. Winchester does not only play a significant role in producing and promoting the cult of Edburga in Anglo-Saxon England, but, more importantly, symbolises the 'English' past in the *SELS*, by which the hagiographers attempted to create a collection of English saints in post-Conquest England. In terms of Edburga's sainthood, her royal background and her local connections with Winchester and Pershore seem more important than her achievements as an abbess. Regardless of her status as an abbess or a nun, there are few doubts that the *SEL* hagiographers were interested in writing the lives of women with institutional power, including Edburga.

Chapter 5

Saint Winifred of Gwytherin: Body, Rape, and Translation

1. Introduction

Among the five monastic female saints in the *SELS*, the seventh-century Winifred, abbess of Gwytherin, North Wales, occupies a unique position. She is the only example of a Welsh holy woman in the *SELS*; her *vita* appears only in MS B; and in the *SELS* she is the only medieval monastic woman who experienced martyrdom. Although Winifred is originally a Welsh saint, her posthumous translation from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury in 1138 opened up the wider celebration of this saint, no longer was she just a Welsh saint, but now became an English saint. Looking at the history of the cult of Winifred, we find that she was one of the most popular saints to have been venerated throughout the Middle Ages, with two flourishing sites of pilgrimage in Holywell and Shrewsbury.¹ Her popularity in medieval England can also be demonstrated by a number of *vitae* in Middle English, including the *Supplementary Gilte Legende*, John Mirk's *Festial*, Caxton's translation of *Golden Legend*, and carols by John Audelay, and Osbern Bokenham's Abbotsford *Legenda aurea*.² MS B, which contains the only

¹ On the comprehensive history of her cult from the Middle Ages to the twelfth-century, see T. W. Pritchard, *St Winefride, her Holy Well and the Jesuit Mission c. 650-1930* (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 2009).

² D'Evelyn and Foster, 'Saints' Legends', pp. 633-34.

For critical editions of these texts, see Hammer and Russell, eds, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the 'Gilte Legende'*, pp. 39-43; Susan Powell, *John Mirk's 'Festial'* I, pp. 162-66. Also, for a modern English translation of Mirk's *vita*, see Winstead, *Chaste Passions*, pp. 82-85; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*, trans. by William Caxton, ed. by F. S. Ellis, 7 vols (Temple Classics, 1900), VI, pp.127-32; *John the Blind Audelay: Poems and*

extant *SEL vita* of Winifred, contains a number of unique saints, many of whom are native saints of England. Winifred is also included here as a native and national saint of England given her nationwide veneration.

As well as the context of the *vita* of Winifred, the content of the *vita* also shows an interesting mixture of classical virgin martyr legends and medieval abbess saint narratives in its hybrid narrative structure. While the *vitae* of other Anglo-Saxon female saints in the *SELS*, such as Frideswide, Æthelthryth, and Mildred, are influenced by classical virgin martyr legends at the levels of borrowing and adapting hagiographic topoi, the *vita* of Winifred incorporates the narrative of martyrdom. The influence of the virgin martyrs of late antiquity in narratives of medieval monastic women is, therefore, most evidently seen in the *vita* of this medieval abbess saint.

This chapter explores the relationships between body, rape, and translation, as depicted the *SEL vita* of Winifred, because the themes of sanctity, sexuality and the body are closely linked in narratives of female sainthood in the Middle Ages and most emphatically shown in the *vita* of Winifred. On the cult of Winifred, both in Wales and England, James Ryan Gregory has provided a foundation for discussions surrounding the legends of Winifred, such as the formation of national identity, history, and translation, by exploring a number of *vitae* of Winifred, in Latin, Welsh, and Middle English, including the *SEL* version.³ What I aim to do in this chapter is to highlight unique characteristics of the *SEL vita* of Winifred and introduce gendered perspectives

Carols (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302), ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009); On Bokenham's *vita*, see James Ryan Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England: Translation, Orality, and National Identity in the Cult of St. Gwenfrewy, 1138-1512', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Georgia, Athens, 2012, pp. 411-21.

³ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England: Translation, Orality, and National Identity in the Cult of St. Gwenfrewy'. I am grateful to Dr Gregory for kindly making his work available to me.

of medieval translation concerning treatments of the female religious body and text. The first part of this chapter examines the narrative structure of the *SEL vita* of Winifred, in which the tropes of virgin martyr and medieval abbess saints coexist. Focusing on her legend's genre hybridity, I argue that both narratives express particular interest in Winifred's body, which is desired by others. The second half of this chapter explores the translation of Winifred, both in the bodily and textual senses. Based on the idea of medieval 'translation', which always involved various acts of transference of both subject and object into a different frame, this chapter suggests that the translation of body and text is key to interpreting the *SEL vita* of Winifred.⁴ The legend of Winifred includes translation at two levels: translation of her body as relics, from Gwytherin in North Wales, where she was an abbess until her death, to Shrewsbury, an English town near the border with Wales; and the translation of her text, from Latin to vernacular languages. The famous episode of her translation, the removal of her relics to Shrewsbury, reveals how the female religious body was treated by men. As is often the case with other *vitae* of abbess saints, ideologies concerning the body of a female saint are particularly significant in this *vita*. Although the *SEL vita* of Winifred does not include the posthumous translation of her body, the *translatio* narratives of Winifred, as represented by Prior Robert of Shrewsbury's twelfth century Latin *translatio* and its fifteenth-century English translation by William Caxton, are

⁴ On medieval translation of body and texts, see Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, 'The Translations of Foy: Bodies, Texts and Places', in *The Medieval Translator, 5 / Traduire au Moyen Age, 5: Proceedings of the International Conques (26-29 July 1993) / Actes du Colloque international de Conques (26-29 juillet 1993)*, ed. by Roger Ellis and René Tixier (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), pp. 29-49; Florence Bourgne, 'Translating Saints' Lives into the Vernacular: *Translation Studii* and *Furta Sacra* (Translation as Theft)', in *The Medieval Translator, 5 / Traduire au Moyen Age, 5*, ed. by Ellis and Tixier, pp. 50-63; Robert Mills, 'Conversion, Translation and Becket's "Heathen" Mother', in *Rethinking the SELS*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 381-402.

concerned with the female body, even after the death of Winifred.⁵ And from reading these *translationes*, I suggest that the translation of Winifred to Shrewsbury can be read as an act of rape, by drawing on the idea of medieval *raptus*, which signifies not only sexual violence but abduction. The idea of translation is also important in its textual sense in the *SEL vita* of Winifred, as well as the whole *SELS*, which involve the adaptation and appropriation of various saints' legends. In the case of the *SEL vita* of Winifred, the incorporation of her text into MS B deserves close attention, since this manuscript is known for being a collection and compilation of a number of native 'English' saints. Relating this discussion surrounding her textual translation to a larger theme, the goal of this chapter is to shed light on some aspects of 'Englishness' in the legends of native saints in the *SELS* revealed through her narrative as the only Welsh saint. In discussions on native saints in Middle English hagiography, Anglo-Saxon saints are often discussed in terms of how they were celebrated as national saints of England, regarding them as the heritage of the Anglo-Saxon past and direct ancestors of post-Conquest England. As Chapters 2-4 have explored English localities through Anglo-Saxon female saints, this concluding chapter provides insight into these issues from a different perspective, through the unique example of Winifred.

2. Virginity, Rape, and the Body

The *vita* of Winifred displays a mixture of virgin martyr and abbess saint legends,

⁵ For Prior Robert's *vita secunda* and *translatio*, see Charles De Smedt, ed., 'Vita secunda sanctæ Wenefredæ', in *Acta sanctorum*, tom I. Nov (1887), pp. 20-45; and for a modern English translation, Ronald Pepin and Hugh Feiss, trans., *Two Mediaeval Lives of Saint Winefride* (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 2000), pp. 25-93.

which do not usually coexist in one narrative. The martyrdom of Winifred is one of the most important parts of her *vita* and veneration. Along with her role as an abbess saint, she is one of the few female virgin martyrs in the medieval British Isles, even though she was miraculously revived after her martyrdom. Her identity as a virgin martyr is shown by two symbolic tokens in the *SEL vita*: a spring appears after her decapitation, and a thread-like scar around her neck develops after her resurrection, which also becomes the origin of her name, Winifred, meaning ‘white thread’. The first part of her *vita* is highly reminiscent of the narratives of classical virgin martyrs, as she is sexually threatened by her suitor and decapitated by him because she rejects him, although at the end it swerves away from the concept of virginity displayed by the classical female martyrs. As is often the case with female saints of late antiquity, virginity is one of the most important features which all *SEL* monastic female saints share, and it is doubtless a crucial qualification for sainthood for the nuns and abbesses in the *SELS*. The Winifred legend illustrates how Winifred’s virginity constructs her as a typical virgin martyr, as well as how its narrative patterns are eventually undermined by her.

The *SEL* narrative focuses on the construction of Winifred’s virginity through her early education by her teacher, Beuno, and the attempted rape by her male suitor, who is the son of a king, called Caradog (although in the *SEL vita* he remains nameless). The beginning of the narrative describes how she becomes a virgin, who is more like classical virgin saints depicted in their *passiones*. It is one of the common features of the *SEL* monastic women that all their *vitae* give account of their religious education. In the *vita* of Winifred, the *SEL* poet particularly emphasises her virginal education to remain a ‘clene mayde’:

þis mayde he tauȝt euer wel to flen al lecherye

& to kepe here body clene fram synne & fram folye;
& þe mayde him be-het myd good wille þo
þat 3he wolde clene mayde byleuen euere-mo (ll. 9-12).

In the Latin *Vita secunda*, her vow of celibacy is described, along with the dilemma she faces to decide between her own will to determine her future and her parents' hope of marrying their only child off in order to give them more offspring (Chapter 4; p. 30). Although they are finally persuaded by their daughter's miraculous resurrection, conflict with parents over female saints' decision to remain virgins is a typical topic of virgin martyr legends. The importance of Winifred's virginity is first taught to her by Beuno and then consolidated by her vow of celibacy. Like classical virgin martyrs, Winifred learns how to become a virgin.

Winifred's virginity, constructed in this way, is then desired and threatened by a male suitor, which eventually brings her the glory of martyrdom. The episode of the attempted rape by Caradog shows how much the *SEL vita* of Winifred is concerned with her body. The obsession with the female body is also one of the characteristics of the theme of virginity of classical female martyrs. Unlike Frideswide's suitor king who threatens her social and legal status as a nun, Caradog's attempted rape, occurs before Winifred takes the veil in a nunnery, and therefore his violence focuses on Winifred's body only. Also, while other *vitae*, including the anonymous *Vita prima Sancti Wenefredae*, Prior Robert of Shrewsbury's *vita secunda Sanctae Wenefredae*, *Gilte Legende*, and Caxton's *Golden Legend*, suggest that Caradog intends to marry her, the *SEL* version omits these parts and focuses on Caradog's violence against her body, which ignores any social restrictions. In the *SEL vita*, Winifred's virginity becomes more distinct once she is physically and sexually threatened by Caradog in an explicitly direct manner.

The representation of Winifred's desirable virginity is more evident since it

provokes the threat of rape by male persecutors directly. While in some *SEL vitae*, male suitors pass through the initial stage of falling in love and proposing marriage, even though they are finally transformed from amorous suitors into impetuous rapists, such as Frideswide's King Algar, Caradog in the *SEL vita* is presented as a would-be rapist from the beginning. When male tormentors appear as rapists, interested only in virginal bodies, rather than as suitors intending to take the virgins as wives, this highlights the desirability of the female saints' corporeal virginity. The earliest legend of Winifred, the *Vita prima*, depicts the scene of Caradog's attempted rape in a way similar to those of virgin martyrs. He is struck not only by 'the young lady's clear and rosy countenance' (p. 99; 'nimphe faciem candour ruboreque confectam', 9:4) but also by her body, especially 'how she was well-formed in her body and her face' (p. 99; 'totam forma et uultu idoneam', 9:5), and the hagiographer writes that 'his heart began to burn with a desire for her which engulfed it' (p. 99; 'illus cor in sui concupiscentia cepit diffusum exardescere, illius cor in sui concupiscentia cepit diffusum exardescere', 9:5-8).⁶ Along with the text's constant references to Winifred as a 'virgin' (*uirgo*), the desirability of Winifred's virginal body is stressed in detail in the *Vita prima*, which is followed by Caradog's direct threat to rape Winifred. Unlike the *Vita prima*, the *SEL vita* does not elaborate on such details, but simply describes in two lines:

þe kyngus sone com to here in his rebaudye
& gan here bysechen faste to don his lecherye (ll. 15-16).

Omitting details such as Caradog's intent to marry her, or detailed descriptions of his

⁶ All quotations from the *vita prima* are from Arthur W. Wade-Evans, ed. and trans., 'Vita prima sancti Wenefredae', in *Vitae sanctorum Britanniae et genealogiae* ([S.I.]: University of Wales Press Boad, 1944), pp. 288-309; and for a modern English translation, see *Two Mediaeval Lives of Saint Winefride*, trans. by Pepin and Feiss, pp. 97-113.

desire for Winifred, the *SEL vita*'s brief description has another effect, highlighting his lust-driven hastiness and immediate violence against her body.

The following quasi-martyrdom of Winifred makes for a somewhat abrupt ending to the first part of her *vita*, in comparison with the virgin martyr legends. No sooner is he rejected and discovers her intent to run away from him than he draws his sword and cuts off her head, without a struggle. This does not allow the saint to confront her persecutor, as virgin martyrs physically and intellectually do. The ultimate choice between 'defiled or dead' which many virgin martyrs face, is imposed on Winifred with urgency, and this leads to her immediate martyrdom.

It is not too much to say that the scene of her martyrdom in the *SEL* gives an anticlimactic impression. Her beheading is done in front of a church door, to where she has run from her house. This is not exactly a private space, but can be considered semi-enclosed, since she is killed by Caradog alone, in the absence of her family. Although virgin martyr legends are sometimes set in inner spaces such as prisons and cells, the virgin saints are usually martyred in public spaces in front of a large audience, as if it were a theatrical spectacle.⁷ Moreover, while Winifred in other Middle English versions is given a chance to make a final remark, declaring that she would rather choose to be a bride of Jesus Christ than to submit to Caradog's filthy desire, the *SEL* hagiographer does not allow Winifred to say anything except a few sentences.⁸ Yet the *SEL* poet recognises the power of her speech, as he mentions that Winifred's 'fayr speche' (l. 109) and 'holy speche' (l. 110) are her virtues, as well as her meekness.

⁷ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, p. 147.

⁸ For example, see *Gilte Legende*, ll. 35-38, in Hammer and Russell, eds, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the 'Gilte Legende'*; John Mirk's *Festial*, ll. 9-11, in Powell, ed., *John Mirk's 'Festial'*; Caxton's translation of *Golden Legend*, p. 129.

Rather, on account of its conciseness, the *SEL vita* of Winifred has a different effect in depicting the scene of martyrdom.

Even though it seems that the *SEL vita* does not glorify the martyrdom of Winifred as much as she deserves, and she is killed without being allowed to perform her virginity, unlike most virgin martyrs, her behaviours are also important in considering her subjectivity in the *SEL vita*. Given that classical virgin martyrs do not usually attempt to run from or trick their attackers, but go straight to their martyrdom after suffering a number of tortures, an example of a female saint attempting to behave strategically deserves attention, as it indicates a marked distinction between her and other medieval female saints, who are always kept alive in every crucial predicament rather than martyred. As soon as she has told Caradog to wait, Winifred runs from him, escaping through the door and heading off to the church where her parents and Beuno are attending a Sunday service. The portrait of Winifred attempting to distract her rapist's attention by persuasion is also reminiscent of female protagonists in semi-hagiographic narratives – such as Constance, one of the most popular heroines in hagiographic romance, who experiences a number of attempted sexual assaults.⁹ Christina of Markyate, for instance, is cornered in a closed room by a lust-driven bishop of Durham who visits her house. She persuades him to let her bolt the door so that they may not be disturbed in the act by others, and even promises that she will never deceive him. Christina, whose quasi-hagiography also deviates from

⁹ See especially Gower's Constance in *Confessio Amantis* (II. 1113-17) and in Nicholas Trivet's *Chronicle* (II. 34-35), who answers her rapists that she will give in to their desire if they arrange the place to have sex. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. by Russell A. Peck, with Latin translations by Andrew Galloway (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003); Trivet, 'De la noble femme Constance', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), II, pp. 297-329.

hagiographic patterns of classical female saints in many ways, thereby successfully tricks the bishop by locking him inside her bedroom (pp. 7-8). Also, the decision to run away is perhaps typical for medieval female saints. Frideswide, Æthelthryth, and Mildred also choose to flee from their opponents rather than confront them, unlike virgin martyrs.

It should also be noted that Winifred attempts to avert her crisis not only by persuading Caradog but also by seducing of him. The *SEL* hagiographer does not illustrate how Winifred confronts her opponent in as much detail as the equivalent event is treated in virgin martyr legends; instead, her struggles to preserve her virginity are shown in a different way to the classical legends through her attempts to deceive Caradog. Unlike the antecedent Latin *vitae*, it is of note that Winifred attempts to trick Caradog by buying herself time to escape. First, she assures him that she will satisfy his desire, but then she asks him to give her the time to dress up appropriately for him:

Ic nam nouȝt, to be þin hore, nouþe I-dyȝt arȝt;
 Ic wole gon to boure & come to þe anon,
 & þan wit my body þy wil þou myȝh don ... (ll. 18-20).

This short passage is the only part where the *SEL* narrator allows Winifred to speak in her own voice, but these lines are also of particular note because they are the *SEL* hagiographer's original lines which cannot be found in other *vitae* of Winifred. The first half line is a challenge, presenting a typical portrait of an unruly virgin martyr found elsewhere in the *SELS*.¹⁰ However, after this speech, the following second half and next two lines quickly undermine the expectations of virgin martyr narratives, as they apparently show her intention to submit her body to Caradog. It is a unique feature

¹⁰ Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, pp. 71-78.

of the *SEL vita* that Winifred quickly changes her mode of speech from provocation to temptation. The mixture of unruly virgin and seductive virgin, or switching from one to another, is only found in this version, and it is supposed to have the certain effect of confounding the expectations of readers and listeners who are familiar with classical virgin martyr legends. Even more remarkable in these lines is that Winifred refers to her 'body'. Although these lines look similar to other Middle English versions in terms of her apparent concession to him, such as in the *Gilte Legende*, Caxton's *Golden Legend*, the *Festial*, and Bokenham, telling Caradog that she needs to be arrayed properly in order to please him better, only the *SEL* hagiographer makes her mention 'body' more explicitly in these short sentences. These lines can also be taken as her active temptation of, rather than passive submission to, her rapist, which later plays a significant role in the posthumous treatment of her body.

The legends of Winifred show an obsession with the saint's body in every narrative of her *vita*, *translatio*, and miracles. In her *vita*, her body is sexually threatened by her suitor; in her *translatio*, the ownership of her dead body is disputed between Gwytheryn and Shrewsbury; in her miracles, she cures people with physical problems, as well as physically punishes evildoers. Her body veers between object and subject, by being possessed by, as well as possessing, the people around her.

As an object, the head of Winifred has particular significance, after Caradog severs it because of her refusal to submit her whole body to him. Although decapitation is a typical way of terminating saints' worldly lives, and most virgin saints are martyred in this way after suffering a number of spectacular tortures, Winifred's decapitation has a further significant meaning, as her severed head produces a cult place in Holywell. The appearance of a spring is a common element of typical Christian miracles. For example, in one of the *vitae* of the *SEL* abbess saints, Frideswide performs a miracle

of making a spring appear for her nuns' convenience.¹¹ Moreover, it is often argued in the case of Welsh hagiography that the existing pre-Christian native cults of wells were Christianised in the Middle Ages, and associated with Christian saints, and certainly many *vitae* of Welsh saints include examples of wells, springs, and fountains.¹² Furthermore, these holy wells have an inseparable connection with the severed head in the cult of early British saints. There is a variety of decapitated saints: from saints resurrected by having their heads restored, to 'cephalophoric' martyrs who carry their heads to their tombs, for example, outside Welsh hagiography, Denis of Paris, Justin, and Juthwara.¹³ A sixth-century virgin saint in Dorset, Juthwara, shares many features with Winifred in her legend: she is one of the few virgin martyrs in the medieval British Isles to be falsely accused for surrendering her chastity, and is decapitated by her brother.¹⁴ After her martyrdom, Juthwara picks up her head and carries it to a church and in the place where she is martyred a holy well springs up. In the *SELS*, the Legend of Kenelm, a young king of the Welsh Marches, also shows the influence of the Welsh well cult and its related episode of decapitation. His *vita* shares features with that of Winifred in its episodes of a miraculous spring emerging after decapitation. The *SEL* version, extant in fourteen manuscripts, including MS B, describes that when

¹¹ See ll. 123-24 in a longer version.

¹² See Francis Jones, *The Holy Wells of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1954), pp. 1-57; Elissa R. Henken, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 105-06, 162-64; Catherine Hamaker, 'Winefrede's Well-Cult', in *The Mediaeval Lives of Saint Winefride*, by Pepin and Feiss, pp. 115-26.

¹³ Anne Ross, 'Severed Heads in Wells: An Aspect of the Well Cult', *Scottish Studies*, 6 (1962), 13-48; Hamaker, 'Winefrede's Well-Cult', p. 120. On the 'cephalophoric' saints, see Winstead, *Chaste Passions*, p. 82.

¹⁴ Blanton, 'The Lost and (Not) Found Sources for Female Saints' Legends in John of Tynemouth's *Sactilogium*', pp. 65-71. On the *vitae* of Juthwara, see Hostmann, 'Nova Legenda Anglie', II, pp. 98-100; Görlach ed., *The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande*, p. 125.

his severed head is discovered, a spring appears, and that it is called Kenelm's well, which heals people with great sickness (ll. 293-96).¹⁵ Winifred's well is also known outside hagiography. One of the most famous references to Winifred's head in non-hagiographic texts is found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Sir Gawain passes by the place called 'Holy hede' (l. 700) on his journey to the Green Chapel, where he is doomed to be decapitated by the Green Knight. For its geographic and thematic similarities, 'Holy hede' is sometimes thought to indicate Winifred's Holywell.¹⁶ The episode of the saint's head is found not only in hagiography and folklore but also in romance.

Winifred's body also plays a crucial role as subject. The punishment of evil characters who do harm to the saints seems typical of hagiography: in the *SEL vitae* of holy monastic women, the king who chases Frideswide is killed by falling from his horse; envious nuns who spy on Edburga are struck blind, although they are later healed by the saint. Although her subjectivity in punishing her rapist is seen indirectly,

¹⁵ On the *SEL vita* of Kenelm, see Horstmann, ed., *The Early 'SEL'*, pp. 345-55; D'Evelyn and Mill, eds, *The 'SEL'*, I, pp. 279-91.

¹⁶ See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, re-edited from MS. Cotton Nero A.x., in the British Museum, ed. by Sir Israel Gollancz, with introductory essays by Mabel Day and Mary S. Serjeantson, EETS, OS, 210 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 700. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, however, dismiss this idea as 'too fanciful'. See pp. 97-98, in Tolkien and Gordon, eds, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 2nd edn, by Norman Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

On the references to saints, including the implication about Winifred in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, see Mary-Ann Stouck, 'Of Talking Heads and Other Marvels: Hagiography and Lay Piety in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', *Florilegium*, 17 (2000), pp. 59-72. For discussions on the identification of 'Holy hede' in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, see John McNeal Dodgson, 'Sir Gawain's Arrival in Wirral', in *Early English and Norse Studies, Presented to Hugh Smith in Honour of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. by Arthur Brown and Peter Foote (London: Methuen, 1963), pp. 19-25; J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 190-94.

as he is punished by a divine miracle, Caradog in the *SEL vita* falls dead all of a sudden after he swings his blade down to decapitate her, and is taken away by devils, immediately after his murder of Winifred. In other Middle English versions, the punishment of Caradog is more detailed: his body suddenly becomes black after Beuno's reproach. In Bokenham's *vita* of Winifred, Caradog is even more harshly cursed and his body is deformed into a dog-like figure. Bokenham notes that he is doomed to bark like a dog for generations, until his descendants come to Holywell to bathe themselves or visit Winifred's shrine at Shrewsbury (ll. 449-55).¹⁷

Winifred punishes other evildoers as well as Caradog, especially in their bodies, through her miraculous spring. Holy well, by nature, contributes to creating a communal body. In the example of Winifred's well, her body is extended first to her miraculous spring, and then to those of people who touch, drink, and bathe in it. Her well, which is part of her body, is shared with local people. Winifred thus becomes the centre of their body, which is the most important part of having a saint's body in society. Yet, it should also be noted that her holy well also has a negative effect on local people. This is particularly evident in the *Vita prima*, which includes a number of posthumous miracles concerning bodies. Apart from the *vita* and the *translatio*, Winifred here becomes a subject: to cure or curse the bodies of other people around her. Despite the fact that she is well-known for her healing spring, the *Vita prima* seems to place more emphasis on the negative side of her miracles; in other words, how Winifred punishes the people who commit a sin against her, such as theft, perjury, or disrespectful treatment of her well, rather than how she cures people. As a result of her punishment

¹⁷ See also Higden, *Polychronicon*, I, p. 429. See Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 176-77.

they are given life-long suffering, especially in their bodies. Although Winifred has been particularly known for her miracles of healing people with problems with their limbs until today, and although curing physical illness is one of the typical miracles of many saints, Winifred's miracles do not only heal the bodies of her worshippers, but also punish those of evildoers, such as paralyzing their legs. Furthermore, while the Latin miracles of Frideswide characteristically collect those happening to the saint's female worshippers, Winifred's miracles do not favour a particular gender, and even including merciless curses on women, such as deforming the face of a matron who beats her handmaid, and making a French knight's wife sterile for the rest of her life because of her unlawful bathing in Winifred's well. The hagiographer of the *Vita prima* concludes: 'It was right that all, who, coming to the heritage of the martyr, unlawfully polluted her sanctuary, should thereafter be encompassed by mocking and derision, jeering and opprobrium' (p. 109; 'Equum quipped fuit, ut, qui in hereditatem martiris uenientes eius sanctuarium illicit polluerunt, omnibus postmodum in eorum circuitu forent illusio et derisum, subsanatio et obprobrium', 27.5-8). These episodes of her somatic punishments suggest how much the cult of Winifred is concerned with and even obsessed by not only her body but also the bodies of others.

3. Monastic Identity

The second half of the *SEL vita* of Winifred moves away from the virgin martyr narrative and is concerned with Winifred's second life as a nun and abbess after her miraculous resurrection. This can also be read as a typical abbess legend concerned with how she takes the veil at a nunnery, how she is appointed head of her abbey, and how she fulfils her duty as an abbess until her death. The resurrection of Winifred is

the most symbolic moment in the *vita*. It is one of the divine miracles, something which would never happen to virgin martyrs, and also it marks an important shift from virgin martyr legend to abbess saint legend in the *vita*. The descriptions of her martyrdom and resurrection are also ritualistic, and are highly reminiscent of both secular and spiritual marriage. As mentioned earlier, the place of her martyrdom and resurrection is in front of the church to which she runs away from Caradog:

þo 3he was wit-inne, a dore 3he ondede anon,
 & suppe to-ward chirche wel 3erne 3he gan gon.
 anon þo þis fool child her-of þe soþe I-say,
 þat he was by-gylid þorw3 þat fayre may,
 after here wel quikliche anon he gan to go,
 & anon drou3 out his swerd þo he com here to,
 & faste by þe cherche-dore he smot of here heued;
 & þus was þis holymayde of here lyf byreued (ll. 23-30).

While the *Vita prima* states only that she reaches the door of monastery (‘monasterii ostium’; Ch. 12), other *vitae*, such as Robert’s *Vita secunda* and the *SEL*, include the detail that her martyrdom and subsequent resurrection occur at the church door. The ‘cherche-dore’ is the place where the solemnisation of medieval marriage usually takes place. In one of the thirteenth-century ecclesiastical laws to describe the ‘correct’ form of the marriage ceremony, a priest must announce the marriage in church before the ceremony, and the vow of marriage must take place with an exchange of formulaic phrases in the presence of the priest.¹⁸ In particular, the twelfth- and thirteenth-century legal sources set down that a dowry must be granted publicly at the beginning of the

¹⁸ See Section 84 of the Salisbury Statutes on ‘concerning the (correct) form of contracting a marriage’, pp. 74-75, in *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Conor McCarthy (London: Routledge, 2004).

marriage, in front of the church, or at the church door.¹⁹ In the *SEL vita* of Winifred, after her martyrdom, a miracle is performed by Beuno in the same place at the church door. In front of an audience that comes out of the church where the people are attending a Sunday service, Beuno prays to God and places Winifred's head back on her body:

þo þis holy prest beuno I-hurd of þis fare,
 sore him of-þou3t þat he nadde I-ben þare;
 & for þat hit nas nou3t þe tyme þat 3he chalde ben dede,
 þefore apredycacioun, to þe peple he haþ I-sede,
 & in his predycacioun, Ic wot, he seyde þis
 "hit ner nou3t tyme þat þe mayde 3it partid fram vs,
 as kende wolde þat 3he chalde her-after libbe longe
 & wel seruy Jhesu crist, mede to ondirfonge;
 þefore ich 3ou bidde þat 3e bidde wit me
 to oure lord Jhesu crist, þat is so hende & fre,
 þat he vs sende to-day aparty of his grace
 & arere þis mayde to lyue in þis place."
 þe heued to þis body þis holy prest gan don:
 & þorw3 his loue & here þat mayde aros anon (ll. 45-58).

While Winifred's martyrdom is consummated without witnesses, Beuno's miracle is performed in public, before the audience, like a spectacle. Beuno's ritualistic performance of the miracle of binding of two bodies – here, Winifred's head to the rest of her body – can be read in the context of matrimonial union, where man and woman, who were once one body, but have been separated since the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, are reunited through the solemnisation of marriage as man and wife. And yet, along with the ideal of marriage as an equal union of man and woman, medieval marriage had an equally important aspect of trading a woman as property in a

¹⁹ Section 6 of Glanville, pp. 112-13 and Bracton, p. 119, on the dowry, in McCarthy, ed., *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages*. See also 'Introduction', pp. 16-19.

patriarchal society. Winifred is traded from Caradog to Beuno, and then Beuno to Christ. Her resurrection can also be seen as the shift in ownership of her body, which causes the transition of her status from belonging to one male figure to another.

Subsequent passages tell that Winifred becomes a nun shortly after the miracle. Becoming a nun means marriage to Christ, as well as death to the world. The rite of ordination of nuns is often described as analogous to a secular wedding, with symbolic elements such as being veiled, accepting rings and wearing crowns, yet marriage to Christ was not a mere metaphor but was actually regarded as a legal marriage in society.²⁰ The *SEL vita* describes that ‘þorw3 beuno-his rede abyte supþe 3he nom, / & ladde swyþe hard lif & good nonne by-com’ (ll. 63-64). The most symbolic ‘abyte’, or nun’s habit, is a veil. The veil is a symbol of monastic virginity, which binds nuns into a communal body and shared identity.²¹

Winifred is also given another ‘cloth’ to wear around her neck, namely the white, thread-like scar around her neck:

euer þer-after aboute here nekke was as þey hit were a prede,
In tokening of þe marterdom þat 3he was on so dede;
whytur þing ne my3te be þan þe prede was (ll. 59-61).

At the scene of her resurrection, the narrative specifically focuses on this scar. The motif of a scar given to a saint’s body is also seen in the *vita* of Æthelthryth. Although the *SEL* version does not include an episode of Æthelthryth’s illness, other accounts such as Bede’s, describe that she suffers from a tumour in her neck until she dies. At her translation, they find that her tumour is gone, only with a small scar remaining

²⁰ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), pp. 37-43.

²¹ Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 127-28.

under her neck which resulted from her doctor, Cynefrith's, treatment before her death. Both scars, caused by men who attempt to save the saints, are symbols of their virginity: in the *vita* of Æthelthryth, not only the disappearance of her tumour but the presence of her scar narrate a miracle of her incorrupt body because of her virginity even after two marriages; in the *vita* of Winifred, a scar around her neck narrates her martyrdom after her refusal to lose her virginity.²² The *SEL vita* of Winifred describes it as a token of her martyrdom in her maidenhood so that it is just like a heroic status symbol in many virgin martyr legends.

Furthermore, the mark signifies her resurrection and the recommencement of her life. It also serves as a symbol of her consecration, including her spiritual marriage to Christ and her vow of celibacy. Winifred's scar of white thread not only forms her monastic identity, like a nun's veil, but the stitch marks also identify her specifically, uniquely herself. While the *SEL* poet only superficially refers to her scar, saying that it looks like a thread whiter than anything, Mirk's *Festial*, following Robert's *vita*, mentions that she is renamed with her Latin name, Winifred, after this mark appears on her body: 'Wherefore þeras scheo was before called Brewa, fro þis day forth men called hyr Wenefrede, þat is in englys a whyte threde' (ll. 64-66). Her renaming from Brewa to Winifred symbolises her rebirth from worldly death to spiritual life. And so the resurrection of Winifred, which is symbolised by her stitch-like scar, shows one important aspect of transition, as her story passes from a virgin martyr to an abbess saint narrative, with various motifs now based on monastic conventions.

The *vita* of other *SEL* nuns and abbesses are usually set in female monastic communities, as typified by Mildred and Edburga, but the *vita* of Winifred contains

²² On analysis of Æthelthryth's scar, see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 40-45.

elements from another medieval literary sub-genre concerning religious women, the motif of spiritual friendship between female religious and their male mentors. The *SEL vita* describes Winifred's relationships with other religious men and women, yet its focus on the relationship between Beuno and Winifred deserves particular attention. The well that springs after her decapitation serves not simply as proof of the saint's miraculous resurrection, but also plays an important role in preserving a life-long relationship between Winifred and Beuno. When Beuno leaves Winifred for his newly appointed position at a monastery, he asks her to make a chasuble for him and throw it into the well so that it may be delivered to Beuno's place every year. This episode is treated as a more emotional separation in the *Vita secunda*, in which narrative both of them reluctantly part in tears (Chapter 17; p. 45), and also in the supplementary *Gilte Legende*, in which they try not to bid farewell to each other by spending a long time in holy conversation near the well (ll. 77-88). Except for the example of Scholastica and her brother Benedict, the theme of inter-sex friendship is not elaborated upon in other *SEL vitae* of monastic women. The *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon female saints in the *SELS* are usually set in female communities, and, with the exception of Edburga, male characters are almost always depicted as intruders into women's monastic life who impose marriage trials on them. The *vita* of Winifred, however, has two male characters, mirror opposites of each other, both of whom make an impact, negative and positive respectively, on her body: one as a rapist, the other as a saviour before Christ.

Winifred's robe, which serves as a token of their spiritual friendship in the narrative, also represents one of monastic women's most important activities: textile production. Just as Christina of Markyate offers a present of embroidered slippers to Pope Adrian, textiles are based on the custom of exchanging gifts between male and

female monastic communities, and nuns often give textile works to male clerics.²³ Manual labour, such as spinning, sewing, weaving, and embroidering, are some of the essential routine works, known as *opus manuum*, but work has more than a practical purpose, of making clothes for themselves and monks, as a creative activity which often involves visual, literary, and devotional imagination.²⁴ The *SEL* narrator admires Winifred's skill at making a rich white chasuble:

At þe welle þat I of spake þe mayde þo him brouȝte,
 & suppe tornyd here aȝen & a chesible him wrouȝte;
 by here myȝt ȝhe hit made boþe good & ryche –
 þer nas in al þe londe no chesible here I-lyche.
 þo hit was I-redy þorw work of here honde,
 In a whit mantel þe chesible ȝhe it wonde... (ll. 77-81).

The skill of making textiles is one of the virtues to be praised in the hagiographic convention in the legends of saintly women.²⁵ Its origin can be traced back to the virtues of the Virgin Mary, whose representations often show her with tools for textile work, such as a spindle.²⁶ What these texts praise might be the holy women's domestic and submissive feminine virtues, but the act of producing textiles certainly enables

²³ Fanous and Leyser, *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, p. xxv.

²⁴ For example, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. by E. Jane Burns (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

²⁵ For example, Queen Edith is described by her hagiographers as a skillful artist for making a splendid embroidery. See 'The Vita of Edith', trans. by Michael Wright and Kathleen Loncar, in *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp. 21-93; Also pp. 38-39 in *Writing the Wilton Women*, ed. by Hollis, Barnes, Hayward, Loncar, and Wright; Hollis, 'Wilton as a Centre of Learning', in *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp. 307-40 (pp. 331-32); Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, p. 32.

²⁶ Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, pp. 155-166.

religious women actively to create narratives, just as texts do.²⁷

Winifred contributes to making narratives through her textile work. Just as she is named after her white, threadlike scar, Winifred's handmade chasuble also plays an important role in defining Beuno. According to the *Vita secunda*, since the delivered cloak remains dry after the journey through the well, he is called by people in Wales 'Beuno Casul Sech', which means 'Beuno the Dry Chasuble' (Chapter 20; Pepin trans., p. 50). Such an act of naming and re-naming is one of the distinct characteristics of the Winifred Legend. Explaining the etymology of saints' Latin names is hagiographic convention, as typified by Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, but providing detailed explanations of how common names are established is also folkloric. Here, instead of written texts, each textile defines each character, Winifred and Beuno, as well as telling a story of miracles. Winifred's thread-like scar narrates her martyrdom and resurrection, while her hand-sewn robe for Beuno narrates an episode that links the two of them.

In the textual history of her *vitae*, the legend of Winifred supposedly begins with an embedded narrative in the now-lost Latin *vita* of Beuno, and so her figure seems less visible on its own than his.²⁸ Yet her figure is not always shaped by Beuno, through his early education and miraculous resurrection; instead, if we look at the re-

²⁷ On religious women as producers of images through their manual labour, see Jocelyn Price [Wogan-Browne], "'Inner" and "Outer": Conceptualizing the Body in *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred's *De institutione inclusarum*', in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell*, ed. by Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 192-208 (p. 201); Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, pp. 32-34.

²⁸ On the textual history, especially the Latin *vita* of Beuno, later translated as *Hystoria o Uched Beuno in Welsh*, as a possible source for Latin *vitae* of Winifred, see Fiona Winward, 'The Lives of St. Wenefred', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 117 (1999), 89-132 (pp. 121-25).

naming of Beuno as an active act, Winifred also weaves his narrative on her own, reshaping his figure. Their mutual relationship is reflected in each other's story telling.

4. Translation of the Body

As seen in the *translatio* of Æthelthryth, the translation of relics inevitably focuses on a saint's body. As one of the most famous *translatio* of saints, Swithun's translation to Old Minster is illustrated in extensive detail in the *SEL vita*. Swithun is first buried in an obscure place outside his church, just as he wishes, but one hundred and nine years later, he appears in a vision to some monks and tells them to translate his body to a shrine inside the Old Minster. The ceremony of his translation is headed by Æthelwold, following customs of translation established on the continent.²⁹ The *SEL vita* of Swithun describes in detail the day of his translation, which is carried out by a group of clerics in decorous clothing, holding candles and crosses, and forming a sumptuous procession:

Ðo þe day was icome to þe minstre hi gonnen wende.
Heo reuestede hem faire inow mid god deuocioun,
wiþ tapres ytend and wiþ crois and feir processioun.
To þe toumbe heo wenden sone þeras þe bodi lay,
ase fel in þe monþe of Jul þe fifteþe day (ll. 138-42).

The *translatio* of Swithun then continues, illustrating how clerics dig up Swithun's holy body in front of a larger audience, how sweet his body smells, and how a blind woman regains her sight and ill people are cured. Although it is not as magnificent as the ritual described in the *vita* of Swithun, the *SEL vita* of Æthelthryth includes the

²⁹ Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, p. 8.

well-known episode of her translation, as well as her posthumous miracles. As both episodes indicate, a rite of translation is an elevation of the saint's body from its original tomb to a new shrine, conducted sometime after the saint's death, and the *translatio* always contains miracles that happen to the saints themselves and/or to audiences witnessing their translation.

Among these examples of translation, there also exist narratives telling how a saint's body is removed from its home to a different place by a third person. Patrick J. Geary argues that the translation of relics often involved acts of stealing, describing a number of examples of monastic theft that took place between the ninth and twelfth centuries.³⁰ Winifred's translation can be considered in the context of such a *furta sacra*, or sacred theft, as her relics were passed onto a different agent, unlike Swithun and Æthelthryth's, whose translation was carried out by people within the same sites.³¹

In the *SELS*, there is a similar episode of a dispute between two places over ownership of a saint's body. In the Legend of Kenelm, after the discovery of his head, two towns – Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, from where he originated, and Clent Hills in Worcestershire, where his body is found – claim ownership of his holy body. In the case of Winifred's translation, the issues of concern are: first, she is translated to a place to which she had no connection before or after her death; second, her body crosses the border between Wales and England.

As is the case with the *SEL vita*, most Middle English *vitae* of Winifred do not contain the episode of her translation. In Latin, there is a twelfth-century *translatio*, written by Prior Robert of Shrewsbury, as well as the *Vita secunda*. In Middle English,

³⁰ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 15.

³¹ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 45-47.

Festial includes her translation to Shrewsbury, and a description of the miracles that happened there in the second half of its sermon for Winifred's feast day. Also, Caxton, who did not include it in his translation of the *Golden Legend*, translated Robert's *translatio* into English, and published it as an individual work in 1485.³² According to Robert's *translatio* and Caxton's Middle English translation, the monks are clearly said to complain about the lack of saints' relics, and express their desire to possess some. At that time, Shrewsbury Abbey was newly built, and it is highly possible that the monks there were looking for relics to be installed in their new abbey.³³ They targeted Wales, where 'they herde saye that there were retheyned the bodyes of many sayntes', and after Radolph's vision of Winifred, they decided to 'gete a lytel parte of relyque o[f] her most blessyd body' (b1^v).³⁴ The translation of Winifred to Shrewsbury was decided and carried out by bishops, priests, and monks from Shrewsbury and Chester.

The troop of English monks confronted opposition from local people in Gwytherin during their forage into Wales. First, a man of the country (in Robert's *translatio*, 'one who was not of low birth', Pepin, trans., p. 82) resolutely tells a prior of Shrewsbury that he represents the voice of the people living in Gwytherin, saying that 'neyther the drede of the prynce [of Bangor] / ne the thretenyng of his lordes / ne ye couetyse of ony money shal not make them to consente to yow in this thyng' (b3^v). Then, they come across a soldier of Belial, who emotionally insists that the saints should not be

³² Robert, Prior of Shrewsbury, *The lyf of the holy [and] blessid vyrgyn saynt Wenefryde*, trans. by William Caxton [Westminster: W. Caxton, 1485].

³³ On the history of the Shrewsbury Abbey, see *Victoria County History of Shropshire*, 2, ed. by A. T. Gayton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 30-37.

³⁴ Robert, *The Lyf of the Holy [and] Blessid Vyrgyn Saynt Wenefryde*, trans. by Caxton.

torn from their home and taken to another place which has no relation to them. Although he is treated as mad and silenced with money, his claims reflect Welsh reluctance to disturb saints' bodies after burial.³⁵ The episode of this soldier is omitted from Caxton's translation, perhaps because, as M. J. C. Lowry argues, he apparently did not like the idea of monks participating in bribery.³⁶ Purchase of relics was another common practice in medieval translation. The *SEL vita* of Edburga clearly states that the abbess sold Edburga's skull to the abbey of Pershore (l. 107). As for the translation of Winifred's relics, it seems clear that the Shrewsbury monks did not consider their acts as theft, as Robert's *vita* includes some episodes of robbers, who dig up the graves of holy people and are punished by God. Yet their act of seizing Winifred's bones can be seen as human trafficking, trading a woman for money. The *translatio* of Winifred involves a gendered power relationship contesting control of a female body, as well as the ideologies of the Welsh and English in the Middle Ages, which are discussed later in this chapter.

As is often the case with virgin martyr narratives, male attempts to control a female body are usually prominent, in the form of rape or attempted rape, in the legends of monastic women in the *SELS*. This does not occur in an explicit way, as in the virgin martyr legends, but all acts of threats to and torture of the female saints can be traced back to male desire to possess their bodies, and thus medieval female saints are often subject to attempted rape by their male tormenters. In the legend of Winifred, both her

³⁵ Robert E. Scully, 'St. Winefride's Well: The Significance and Survival of a Welsh Catholic Shrine from the Early Middle Ages to the Present Day', in *Saints and their Cults in the Atlantic World*, ed. by Margaret Cormack (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2007), pp. 202-28 (p. 205).

³⁶ M. J. C. Lowry, 'Caxton, St Winifred and the Lady Margaret Beaufort', *The Library*, Sixth Series, 5.2 (June 1983), 101-17 (p. 106).

vita and *translatio* are concerned with Winifred's body as an object. The theme of rape is also crucial here, not only because she is threatened with attempted rape by Caradog, but also because she is faced with a second rape, or *raptus*, which is her translation. Although Geary does not fully explore the gendered aspects of *furta sacra* relating to the bodies of female saints, he briefly, but most interestingly, compares this practice to the 'kidnappings of brides by their prospective husbands' and acts of 'seduction' in his conclusion.³⁷ As these metaphors imply, *furta* narratives are also open to gendered reading, with a focus on the female body. It is even possible to consider that acts of translation and the *translatio* narratives of female saints, including the episodes of sacred theft such as Winifred's, generally contain elements of rape. Otter considers the tribulations that happened to the translated Æthelthryth's body as a rape, by interpreting the manner in which the Viking and an unnamed presbyter treat her dead body in *Liber Eliensis* as 'attempted symbolic rape of a dead female saint'.³⁸ Even though the translation of Æthelthryth is conducted properly, this still suggests that an act of translation, especially at the stage of the inspection of incorrupt female saints, involves a certain danger of rape. Even after the translation, Æthelthryth's translated body, placed in male surroundings, is both 'previously "raped"' and also 'still "rapable"' and her translation can possibly be seen as an example of male clerics' voyeuristic and necrophiliac inspection, because her body is incorrupt.³⁹ Otter's suggestions allow us to reread miraculous stories of the incorrupt saints, which often

³⁷ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 133. On acts of stealing women, see Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁸ Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', p. 140. See also Fairweather, trans., *Liber Eliensis*, I:41 and I:49.

³⁹ Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', p. 161.

tell how beautifully their bodies were preserved after their posthumous discovery, from a different, body-centred perspective. Considering this idea of male possession and control of the female body even after the death of the saints, the narrative of saints' translation certainly has a potential to be read as a story of rape.

The concept of symbolic rape is useful in considering the second rape in Winifred's *vita*. As her flesh has gone and only her bones remain, Winifred is different from other female incorrupt saints such as Æthelthryth. Yet the translation of Winifred can also be considered as a symbolic rape, if we widen the meaning of rape to include the medieval sense of *raptus*. *Raptus* in the Middle Ages signified not only sexual violence, as 'rape' in a modern sense, but also 'seizing' in a wider sense, based on patriarchal ideas of women as property.⁴⁰ Applying this idea to Winifred's translation, *raptus* as abduction fits the episode of her translation well. Of course, this does not mean eliminating the potential violence in Winifred's *translatio*, just because this medieval understanding of *raptus* did not always indicate sexual violence. As Jane Cartwright points out, there were abducted female saints in medieval Wales, and although they were released by their body-snatchers and suitors with their virginity intact, the act of abduction can certainly be considered as physical violence against the female body in their legends.⁴¹ I would therefore suggest that the abduction of Winifred's body should also be seen as symbolic rape, and with this approach, the translation of Winifred, and especially the issues concerning relic theft, should be reconsidered as a particular kind of violence against the female body.

Many scholars regard the consent given from the raped women's side in medieval

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England*, p. 2.

⁴¹ Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, pp. 91-92.

raptus as an important factor for defining what medieval rape is, from readings of medieval laws and literature.⁴² Although the medieval English laws conflated *raptus* regarding various conditions of consent, including marriage choice and elopement as criminal acts, they were concerned with whether *raptus* involved a woman's consent or not, in order to discern whether it should be punished by law.⁴³ Similarly, in virginity literature, women's will or consent is seen as important in defining virginity in relation to rape, as well as the issue of whether women experience physical pleasure or not.⁴⁴ There are several unusual examples of raped female saints who remain virgins in Welsh hagiography, including Saint Non, mother of Saint David, but these might be explained by the Augustinian idea of virginity that a woman raped without her consent does not lose her virginity.⁴⁵ Therefore, raped women's consent defines their virginity as disgracefully lost by *raptus* or lost as a result of premarital intercourse; it is even possible to consider that their spiritual virginity is not lost at all.

⁴² For example, see Christopher Cannon, 'Raptus in the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer', *Speculum*, 68.1 (1993), 74-94; 'Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties', in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 255-79; Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Kim M. Phillips, 'Four Virgin' Tales: Sex and Power in Medieval Law', in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. by Bernau, Evans, and Salih, pp. 80-101; Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); McSheffrey and Julia Pope, 'Ravishment, Legal Narratives, and Chivalric Culture in Fifteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 48.4 (2009), 818-36.

⁴³ Cannon, 'Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties', pp. 258-62.

⁴⁴ See Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England*, pp. 95-99.

⁴⁵ Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 26-28; Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). In Book I, Chapter 18, he insists that raped women's sanctity in soul is never lost even if their bodies are violated (I:18).

On Non and other raped Welsh saints, see Jane Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, pp. 95-121.

In *furta* narratives, too, Geary states that the justification and rationalisation for the theft of the body are important, which are often provided by the saints themselves, through visions and miracles. The saints' will surpasses legal and moral considerations concerning the relic thefts.⁴⁶ For the Shrewsbury monks, the *raptus* of Winifred had to be considered as a legal marriage. What they needed, then, was her consent before or after, in the form of pre-translation visions and post-translation miracles in order to justify their *raptus* as translation. Her prior consent to the *raptus* is shown indirectly to the Shrewsbury monks through visions, but the first vision in which she appears is to Radolph, a sub-prior of Chester, not a monk at Shrewsbury. When he prays for a certain ill brother at Shrewsbury, she tells him to send his brothers to her well at Holywell and celebrate a mass. Radolph initially hesitates to tell his brothers of the vision, for fear of having them dismiss it as an illusion, but when they do as they are told by Winifred, the Shrewsbury monk's illness is completely cured. Although this episode does not seem convincing enough to confirm that her vision marks her consent to the Shrewsbury monks, Chester nevertheless plays an important role as an agent linking Winifred with the Shrewsbury monks.

Most interestingly, it is not too much to say that the project of the translation of Winifred originated in Chester. Shrewsbury first learned about Winifred through Chester. The earliest account of Holywell as a place for pilgrimage appears in a Chester charter in 1119, which indicates that Chester already knew about Winifred's miraculous spring very well.⁴⁷ Also, Henry Bradshaw describes an episode in which Richard, Earl of Chester, intended to visit Holywell on pilgrimage to Winifred's shrine

⁴⁶ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 112-14.

⁴⁷ Winward, 'The Lives of St. Wenefred', pp. 95 and 98.

before her relics were translated to Shrewsbury.⁴⁸

There are further reasons why the Shrewsbury monks' cooperation with Chester was important. By the time the Shrewsbury monks considered acquiring any saint's relics, Chester had gained its own patron saint, a seventh-century royal abbess, Werburga. Although she became a more established, powerful patron saint of Chester in the later medieval period, as depicted in Bradshaw's *Life of Saint Werburge* in 1521, Werburga was venerated as a patron saint of Chester after the translation of her relics from Hunbury in the tenth century, and it is possible that Shrewsbury was somehow inspired by Chester's success in acquiring its female patron saint, and so attempted to secure its own.⁴⁹ Hugh Feiss suggests that the Shrewsbury monks wanted to have relics of a female saint, just like their neighbouring abbeys: 'The monks of Chester had St. Werburga, the Cluniac monks of Much Wenlock had the relics of St. Milburga, and the monks of Shrewsbury would have the relics of St. Winefride'.⁵⁰ Werburga is especially known as a saviour of Chester, as is shown by a number of her posthumous miracles defending Chester from invasions, and she certainly played a fundamental role in establishing a solid local identity at Chester. For these links to be established between Winifred and Werburga, it was essential for the Shrewsbury monks to benefit from Chester's expertise in translating a virgin saint and follow the example of the translation of Werburga; but their motive in justifying their *raptus* of Winifred's body seems to have been insufficient in the moments before the translation. Whether

⁴⁸ See Horstmann, ed., *The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester*, EETS, OS 88 (London: Trübner, 1887), ll. 1416-1422.

⁴⁹ On Bradshaw's *Life of Saint Werburge*, see also Lewis, 'History, Historiography and Re-writing the Past', pp. 132-140; Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, pp. 89-115.

⁵⁰ Feiss, 'Introduction', in *Two Mediaeval Lives of Winifred*, trans. by Pepin and Feiss, pp. 7-22 (pp. 10-11).

Winifred gave direct consent to Shrewsbury remains uncertain.

Following the Chester monks' vision, the Shrewsbury monks begin to claim legitimate ownership of Winifred, in cooperation with Chester. During their journey to Holywell, they receive more revelations in more indirect ways, through visions of Godfrey (the dead priest of Shrewsbury), the voice of the young man, and what appears to have been Winifred. Yet these visions are not enough to convince them of the rightness of their plan, and so they turned to male authorities, such as the Prince of Bangor and a priest, to secure their consent rather than that of Winifred herself in order to consummate the translation, or *raptus*, of her body.

Of these various consultations, the Prince of Bangor's advice implies their treatment of Winifred's body. The prince encourages them to carry out their plan, saying:

wherefore I graunte it gladly / and to her plasir I knowlege me to assente
/ lest in resystyng and gayn auengyng it on me / And though I be defowled
in al vnclennesse / and am werst of all other men // þet neuertheles I shal
helpe to breke vp hir tombe and touchyng her holy bone ... I shal delyuer
them to yow... (b2^r)

Here, both senses of *raptus*, as sexual violence and abduction, are mixed together. While he considers the matter of her consent, in terms of her pleasure and displeasure, his vocabulary, including such words as 'plasir', 'defowled', and 'touchyng', either consciously or unconsciously contains certain sexual connotations in the treatment of a female body, even though it is dead, and only bones remain. Also, what the prince suggests with the words 'breke vp hir tombe and touching her holy bone' still sounds like the abduction of Winifred, rather than a legitimate translation. As the episodes of the translation of Æthelthryth suggest, the translation of relics must be carried out carefully, with the incorrupt body 'untouched ... and unseen', in order not to provoke

the anger of the saint. It is certainly not permitted to break up the tomb, or, even worse, touch the bones of a virgin saint, unless they are given sufficient consent by her.⁵¹

The Prince of Bangor's remarks also imply another *raptus*. As is seen in the *vitae* of Frideswide, the violation of a city corresponds with that of a female body. Considering the geography in which Winifred's translation takes place, his comments collapse the polarised structure separating England and Wales. It seems that Gwytherin and Holywell are even left out of their discussions of Winifred's translation. Winifred's body in Gwytherin is gradually besieged by the monks of Shrewsbury and Chester and the bishop and prince of Bangor, and is finally penetrated by them. Since medieval communities were based on a concentric model, with relics of local saints placed at their heart, the *raptus* of a saint's body can also mean the invasion of the town, and vice versa, as is discussed in Chapter 1, on Frideswide. Moreover, on the English side, and especially in the Welsh Marches, Marchers themselves, including those who lived in Shrewsbury and Chester, were constantly threatened by incursions.⁵² Christopher Cannon argues that religious texts from the *Ancrene Wisse* Group, which, he suggests, were most probably produced around that area, express a form of 'anxiety about bodily boundaries and their penetration'.⁵³ Therefore, the possession of patron saints, especially virgins, was more important in these borderland areas. The Shrewsbury monks intended to build a community centred on the body of the saint by consummating *raptus*, in other words, seizing Winifred's skull from Gwytherin. This can also be compared to another metaphorical rape – the rape of Gwytherin,

⁵¹ Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', p. 140.

⁵² Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 143.

⁵³ Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature*, p. 143.

consummated to protect Shrewsbury from being ‘raped’ by others in the same way. Unlike Werburga, who does not only preserve her virgin body from various sexual threats during her life time, but also posthumously defends Chester from intruders, the *raptus* of Winifred symbolically causes the penetration of Gwetherin as well. The case of Winifred and her cult in Wales is slightly different from the towns of Oxford and Chester which were concentrated into one cult centre where the bodies of female saints were placed, because Winifred had two centres: Gwytherin, where her relics were formerly placed, and Holywell, where her miracle was performed. Although her cult site in Holywell is secured, one *raptus* brings another *raptus* of the towns and tombs of saints in the Welsh Marches.

The English monks strove to collect legitimate ways to justify their *raptus* of Winifred. As mentioned earlier, Winifred’s consent to the *raptus* before the translation is displayed through ambiguous visions, including the one that appeared to the monk at Chester. If these visions were not seen as evidence of her consent, then, as in the case of the *raptus* which was consummated without the woman’s agreement, obtaining her retrospective consent was essential so that the rapists were not to be criminally culpable. Although the thirteenth-century laws, known as the Westminster Statutes I and II, prohibited *raptus*, including forced coitus and abduction, even with women’s consent, there was a traditional idea that if women agreed to forced coitus after the act, rapists were acquitted so long as they married their victims.⁵⁴ In other words, *raptus* could be justified as legal marriage through retrospective consent. In the *furta sacra*,

⁵⁴ Cannon, ‘*Raptus* in the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer’, p. 81; Cannon, ‘Chaucer and Rape’, p. 256.

For the Westminster Statutes I and II, see Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England*, pp. 196-98.

both prior and subsequent consent from a saint were needed. According to this view, the *raptus* of Winifred also needed her consent after her translation in the form of visions and miracles so that Shrewsbury could venerate her as their own saint. Furthermore, the saint's retrospective consent was perhaps more important than prior visions, as the consent then came through the grace of miracles, which the thieves of the saint's body most desired. The saint's continuous giving of her consent in the form of miracles thus played a significant role in the flourishing of the local community.

As a sign of Winifred's consent after the *translatio* and *raptus*, the *translatio* texts describe a miracle: the healing of a man with paralysed limbs. As seen in the *Vita prima*, healing is the most typical of Winifred's miracles. The *translatio* also tells of an extraordinary natural phenomenon: a rain-storm drenching the surrounding fields, which occurs on the day of her translation, and which Robert apparently interprets to suit his purpose – that Winifred helped them carry out the rite of translation. Given that the *translatio* is a part of a genre often telling of a number of miracles performed by the translated saint, one might think that this small number of miracles, the healing of a man and an ambiguous natural phenomenon, does not seem enough for them to have read them as signs of her consent, in comparison with the extensive list of miracles which she performed in Holywell, as illustrated in the *Vita prima*. The apparent lack of miracles may be attributed to the dates when Robert's *translatio* was written, however. It usually takes a certain amount of time to pile up post-translation miracles and, considering Robert wrote the *translatio* of Winifred shortly after the translation of her relics in 1138, Shrewsbury may just have been waiting to receive more miracles showing Winifred's retrospective consent. In fact, the late fourteenth-century text of Winifred by Mirk describing the translation and subsequent miracles tells that 'in schorte tyme aftur God wroghte þritty grete myracles' (ll. 102-03),

including that of Adam from Arkleton, although the phrase ‘in shorte tyme’ indicates the difference between each text’s perception of time. The posthumous miracles in narratives of translation are usually written retrospectively for the purpose of documenting the past surrounding saints and shrines. Robert’s *translatio* opened up the opportunity for future miracles to demonstrate Winifred’s retrospective consent to the *raptus*.

At the same time, Robert’s *translatio*, as well as its English translation by Caxton, is rather more concerned with telling the *raptus* of Winifred from Gwytherin than the rite of translation to Shrewsbury. Robert provides detailed accounts of their journey to Wales – how they decide to target Winifred, how they find the place where the body of the saint is buried, and how they meet various people who support and oppose their intentions, culminating in the scene of digging her tomb and touching her skull in Gwytherin. Their focus on the *raptus* rather than the translation thus gives the impression that the text seems indifferent to telling the story once they attain their target, including the post-translation miracles in Shrewsbury.

None of these episodes of her translation are included in the *SEL* version, since the *vita* ends with her death. Yet Winifred presents an interesting view about her own body, which is not found in any other versions. As mentioned earlier, the words she speaks when faced with the rapist, ‘my body þy wil þou myth don’ (l. 20), are potentially powerful when combined with the preceding sentences directed at Caradog. This can also be read as implying her second *raptus*, when her words are directed not only at Caradog, but also prophetically at the usurpers of her body after her death. The image of Caradog overlaps with that of the English monks, even including the Welsh bishop and prince, who committed *raptus* in the name of translation. Moreover, what is more notable about this line is Winifred’s attempt to manipulate her rapists. Her body

significantly serves as a subject that actively seduces people around her, and this agency continues across further generations of her sacred texts. Given the idea of retrospective consent which justifies *raptus*, Winifred agrees to the translation of her body afterwards by performing a miracle at Shrewsbury, recorded in Robert's *translatio*, and later her miracles showing her consent appear in other texts which commemorate her. Through her consent, Shrewsbury enjoyed the patronage of Winifred; and from Shrewsbury her status as a patron saint eventually reached a position of a national saint of England.

5. Translation of Texts

The literary translation of saints' legends can be considered as another form of the *furta sacra*. Florence Bourgne argues that both acts – the *furta sacra* and the translation of saints' legends into vernacular languages – were aimed at building up the proximity between saints and their venerators through relics or texts.⁵⁵ As *furta sacra* involves a power relationship between thieves, relics, and their original owners, textual translation could also be concerned with that between translators and the translated.⁵⁶ The theory of medieval translation derives its origin from the concept of *translatio studii et imperii*, which means the transferal of classical learning and that of empire.⁵⁷ Translation, even linguistic and literary, embraces various ideological

⁵⁵ Bourgne, 'Translating Saints' Lives into the Vernacular', pp. 60-62.

⁵⁶ On power construction in medieval translation, see Ruth Evans, 'Historicizing Postcolonial Criticism: Cultural Difference and the Vernacular', in *The Idea of Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. by Wogan-Browne, Watson, Taylor and Evans (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 366-70.

⁵⁷ Emma Campbell and Mills, eds, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics,*

acts.⁵⁸ Acts of textual translation, which sometimes become even closer to an act of *raptus*, involve the processes of appropriation and assimilation at various levels.

While the translation of the body in the Winifred legends occurred between the English and Welsh, the textual translation of Winifred was concerned with a more complex relationship between English, Welsh, and also Latin. In considering the linguistic translation of the Winifred Legend, two levels of translation can be examined: first, the translation of her narratives into written Latin *vitae*; and second, the translation from the Latin *vitae* into vernacular languages. In the second phase of vernacular translation, especially into Middle English, the incorporation into such larger hagiographic cycles as the *SELS* is also at issue. The textual transmission and translation of the Winifred legend begins with the *vitae* written in Latin: the anonymous *Vita prima* and Robert's *Vita secunda et translatio*, produced around the twelfth century. The English *vitae*, such as Mirk's *Festial* and *Gilte Legende*, were written from the late fourteenth century onwards, and Welsh versions followed.⁵⁹ The

Politics, Theory (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 1-20 (pp. 1-2).

On the topos of *translatio studii et imperii*, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Press, 1953), pp. 28-29; for its theories, see Evans, Andrew Taylor, Watson, and Wogan-Browne, 'The Notion of Vernacular Theory', in *The Idea of Vernacular*, ed. by Wogan-Browne, Watson, Taylor, and Evans, pp. 314-30 (pp. 316-21); Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

On the *translatio imperii* in the *SELS*, see Wogan-Browne, Watson, Taylor, and Evans, eds, *The Idea of the Vernacular*, p. 196; Kimberly K. Bell, "'Holie Mannes Liues': England and its Saints in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Laud Misc. 108's *King Horn* and *South English Legendary*", in *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108*, ed. by Bell and Nelson Couch, pp. 251-74 (p. 259).

⁵⁸ Campbell and Mills, eds, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking Medieval Translation*, pp. 1-2. For the post-colonial aspects of medieval translation, see Evans, 'Historicizing Postcolonial Criticism', p. 367.

⁵⁹ On the textual transmission of the Winifred *vitae*, see Fiona Winward, 'The Lives of St.

relatively late production of Welsh *vitae* of Winifred can be explained by the tradition of Welsh hagiography. The *vitae* of Welsh saints were established during the late-eleventh and early twelfth centuries, when vernacular versions, including Welsh, of Latin texts were translated.⁶⁰ There are four surviving manuscripts of the Welsh *vitae* of Winifred, dated between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶¹ Given that the textual tradition of the Winifred legend as individual *vitae* began with the twelfth-century Latin *vitae* and translation, and English was the first vernacular translation of the *vitae*, Anglo-Latin influence was prominent in the textual veneration of Winifred, as well as in the textual transmission of her legend.

Behind these textual transmissions and translations of the Winifred legend, however, there also lie undocumented sources. One of the earliest Latin accounts, Robert's *Vita et translatio*, suggests the influence of oral sources. In the Prologue, he says that his motivation for writing the *vita* of Winifred is to satisfy the readers' desire to complete the incomplete narrative of Winifred, which had made them keep 'sighing with panting breath' (p. 26; 'anhelo spiritu suspirare', p. 26). So, he gathered fragmented bodies of her narratives from written and oral records, and excluded untrustworthy episodes from the oral tradition, and wrote the *vita* 'in simple language, with all ambiguity removed' (p. 26; 'omni ambiguo remoto ... simplici sermone'; p. 21). Also, his process of producing the *vita* is highly reminiscent of that of translation

Wenefred', 89-132. For the Welsh *vitae* of Winifred, see Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, pp. 72-76; Gregory, 'Welsh Saint in England', pp. 311-18, and pp. 327-49.

⁶⁰ Nerys Ann Jones and Morfydd E. Owen, 'Twelfth-Century Welsh Hagiography: The *Gogynfeirdd* Poems to Saints', in *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults*, ed. by Jane Cartwright (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 45-76 (p. 45).

⁶¹ Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, pp. 125-26.

of relics: collection, inspection, and integration of the saint's body into a prepared framework. Given that Robert reveals his writing process, and especially his selection of existing episodes, his re-telling of oral narratives cannot be an unbiased act in any event, even if it marked a simple attempt to document and record the narratives in textual form. In the case of Robert's *Vita secunda*, vernacular materials of the narrative, both oral and written, are integrated into one 'complete' narrative in the authoritative clerical language, Latin. Textualisation and documentation can sometimes involve the desire to conquer the other's local narrative and relocate it in one's own language, just like the translation of the body.

These documented Latin narratives then went through further translation into vernacular languages. Anglo-Latin hagiographic texts sometimes reveal their views on languages such as Latin, English, and Welsh. Above all, the hagiographic texts of saints from the Welsh Marches seem to be conscious of issues of translation and language, partly because of their geographic situation on the border. There are examples of holy Welsh missionaries who had the gift of xenoglossia, or abilities to understand foreign languages and communicate with foreign people through miraculous translation.⁶² While xenoglossia is one of the common hagiographic miracles, in one case, Guthlac of Crowland, a son of a king of the Welsh Marches in the seventh century, states that he knows what devils speak in a British language,

⁶² Christine F. Cooper, "But Algate Therby Was She Understonde": Translating Custance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36.1 (2006), 27-38 (p. 33).

On xenoglossia in hagiography, see Cooper, 'Translating Custance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*', p. 28 and pp. 30-31; Mills, 'Invisible Translation, Language Difference and the Scandal of Becket's Mother', in *Rethinking Medieval Translation*, ed. by Campbell and Mills, pp. 125-46 (see esp. pp. 126-27).

namely Welsh, because of his experience of learning during exile.⁶³ This episode suggests the text's interest in linguistic differences and translation, as well as the colonial aspects of linguistic translation.⁶⁴

The *SELS* also contain a narrative of another saint, Kenelm, whose body and text are translated. He is also a saint from the Welsh Marches, but his *SEL vita* revels in the relationship between Latin and English. Along with frequent quotations from the Latin psalms, the *vita* is often concerned with linguistic translation between Latin and English, especially through an episode of a heavenly letter. The letter indicates the place where Kenelm's severed head is buried, and is delivered to the Pope in Rome, but the Pope cannot understand what the letter says because it is written in English.⁶⁵ This potentially comic moment also reveals an irony: the Pope needs translators to understand the heavenly letter, unlike other saints with gifts of xenoglossia, or Guthlac. Also, the *SEL* hagiographer confers English with a status equivalent to, or even higher than Latin, by showing that the letter from God is written in English. Therefore, the Pope, the most authoritative figure in western Christendom, has to ask for translators.

⁶³ See Chapter 34 in *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956). The *SEL* Life of Guthlac is extant in three manuscripts, including MS B. Although the *SEL* version of Guthlac does not include this episode, on the edited texts of the *SEL vita* of Guthlac, see Bolton, 'The Middle English and Latin Poems of Saint Guthlac', pp. 139-233.

⁶⁴ For a post-colonial reading of this episode, see Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 140-46.

⁶⁵ See ll. 259-60 of the legend of Kenelm in D'Evelyn and Mill's edition: 'He nuste wat it was to segge ne in wit neccu[th]e iwite / For he ne cou[th]e Engliss non and an Engliss it was iwrite'.

According to the *SEL vita*, the letter was later preserved as a great relic in Rome. On heavenly letters as relics in the *vitae* of Kenelm and other saints, see Chloe Morgan, "'Lite Bokes" and "Grete Relikes": Texts and their Transmission in the *SEL*', in *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 149-67.

This episode shows one of the most significant motivations of the *SELS*, producing hagiographic collections of English saints in English. In the making of English saints and the writing about English saints in English, the presence of Latin authority is immense, not only because the translations of saints' *vitae* into vernacular languages is often based on the Latin *vitae*, but also because Latin (text) and popes (corporeal) have authority in legitimising saints. Also, given that the context of MS B, which is known as a unique collection of thirteen *vitae* of popes, there exist intersections between Latin and English on this manuscript in terms of language and saints.⁶⁶ The context and contents of MS B show various aspects of the relationship between English and Latin, as well as between English saints and popes, ranging from the hagiographer's anxiety about the relationships to his rather challenging attempts to equalise and naturalise them by arranging both popes and English native saints in line with each other.

6. Making an English Saint

Considering the historical background of the *SEL vita* of Winifred, the selection of Winifred in MS B coincides with the cult of Winifred as a national saint both in Wales and England. The compilation of this manuscript is dated back to the first half of the fifteenth century.⁶⁷ The period between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries witnessed a growing interest in creating national saints. Welsh saints such as

⁶⁶ On the collection of the *vitae* of popes, see Wogan-Browne, 'Bodies of Belief: MS Bodley 779's *SEL*', in *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 403-23.

⁶⁷ On the date of this manuscript's production, see Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*, p. 76; Wogan-Browne, 'Bodies of Belief', pp. 403-04.

David and Winifred began to be venerated in England through the elevation of their feasts by archbishops of Canterbury.⁶⁸ Although the translation of Winifred's relics had already been carried out in the twelfth century, when her bones were placed at Shrewsbury Abbey, the feast of Winifred, as well as those of George, David, and Chad, was elevated to a national holiday twice by archbishops of Canterbury, first in 1398 by Roger Walden, and second in 1415 by Henry Chichele. Following the first and second elevations, Winifred's feast appeared in the Sarum Calendar, and was supposed to be observed with nine lessons in the province of Canterbury.⁶⁹ Gregory argues that behind the elevation and re-elevation of Winifred's feast lay English kings' political and devotional interest in Wales: Richard II (1367-1400) explored his power in North and West Wales and travelled in Wales, including making a pilgrimage to Holywell; and Henry V (1386-1422) led an army against Henry Percy and Owain Glyn Dŵr at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403 before he acceded to the throne, and afterwards increased his devotion to Winifred as his saviour in the battle.⁷⁰ Also, both elevations were done during the absence of Thomas Arundel, then Archbishop of Canterbury, who seems to have had a negative attitude towards the Welsh – at the first elevation in 1398 he was in exile, and only after Arundel's apparent repeal and death was Winifred's feast day re-elevated in 1415.⁷¹ Thus, the elevation and re-elevation of the

⁶⁸ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 226-38.

⁶⁹ Pritchard, *St Winefride, her Holy Well and the Jesuit Mission*, p. 55; Lowry, 'Caxton, St Winifred and the Lady Margaret Beaufort', p. 111; Anne F. Sutton, 'Caxton, the Cult of St. Winifred, and Shrewsbury', in *The Fifteenth Century, V: Of Mice and Men: Image, Belief and Regulation in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Linda Clark (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 109-26 (pp. 114-15).

⁷⁰ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', p. 232 and pp. 238-39. See also Christopher Allmand, *Henry V* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 416.

⁷¹ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 228-36.

Welsh saints, including Winifred, first intended as a response to Welsh dissatisfaction and then as a way of reconciling with them after a series of political upheavals there, were supported and welcomed in Wales.⁷² Along with the influence from other contemporary Middle English texts, the inclusion of Winifred in MS B was apparently influenced by the growing popularity of this Welsh saint on the English side.

While Robert's *vita* and *translatio* focus on the relationship between North Wales and Shrewsbury, the *SEL vita*, which is staged in Holywell and Gwytherin, is rather more concerned with Winifred's local identities. Although, as discussed in the Introduction, it is necessary to explore various localities represented in the *SEL vitae* of native saints rather than see a monolithic national identity in them, in the case of Winifred, her depiction as a national saint of England is of particular note, as she was transformed from a local Welsh saint into an English saint through the translation of body and then of her text. The *SEL vita* of Winifred, however, presents her as one of the national English saints in an ambiguous way.

The geographical areas of the Winifred legend were places where various political, social, and linguistic tensions between Wales and England intersected. These borderland areas, including Chester and Shrewsbury, are called the Marches of Wales. The March is usually loosely defined as a fluid territory rather than a place demarcated by a clear line.⁷³ Because of its fluidity and marginality, this area between Wales and England was also a place where a new identity was created after a number of conflicts and assimilations. In the post-Conquest Welsh Marches, there had been incursions from the Normans into Wales and from the Welsh into England; and the *Vita prima*

⁷² Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', p. 231 and p. 237.

⁷³ Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature*, p. 145.

recounts Winifred's posthumous miracles chronologically, alongside this Welsh history of conflicts with the Normans, until just before the translation of her relics. The text frequently refers to Norman colonisation, for example, by starting an episode of miracles with 'in the days of the French in that same land' [Holywell] (p. 12; 'Diebus quin etiam Francorum in eadem terra'; Ch. 23). Also, the *Vita prima* includes significant events, such as the outbreak of Welsh-French battles (Ch. 24) and the expulsion of the French from Wales (Ch. 45). The latter event is followed by a miracle in which the water of Winifred's well changes into a milky liquid, which seems to celebrate this historical achievement. Similarly, an episode in which a French knight and his wife are punished by Winifred suggests that the *Vita prima* contains an anti-French attitude from the Welsh side.

While anxieties about the Norman invasion are prominent in the *Vita prima*, Robert's *Vita secunda et translatio* does not express any political conflicts on the surface. Instead, Robert allots much space to describing the Shrewsbury monks' journey to Wales in search of Winifred's body, with references to specific places, and the text's interest in geography possibly reflects their desire to explore or conquer Wales. This corresponds with the political background of the March areas in the twelfth century. Both Chester and Shrewsbury were founded by William the Conqueror as earldoms between 1069 and 1071;⁷⁴ also, William I installed a Norman bishop at Bangor in 1092.⁷⁵ It is possible to consider that the translation and veneration of Welsh saints were also part of the programmes of the conquest of Wales by the Normans, under the guise of spiritual mission.

⁷⁴ R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 28.

⁷⁵ Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, p. 31.

The Normans used marriage as one of their strategies for the conquest and colonisation of England and Wales. Intermarriage with indigenous people, including Anglo-Saxon and Welsh, was intended to transform the Normans into the English.⁷⁶ In her post-colonial reading of the *vita* of Christina of Markyate, Diane Watt argues that Christina's rejection of marriage is motivated not only by Christina's vow of celibacy, but also by her resistance to the Normans, which challenges a recent view of Christina as an assimilationist model of Anglo-Saxon women in post-Conquest England.⁷⁷ Christina, who was, like Winifred, threatened by rape by the Normans in the twelfth century, can be compared to Winifred, whose posthumous translation is also considered to be an inter-marriage with the Normans. In the case of Winifred's translation, however, although Winifred first resisted rape by an English or Anglo-Saxon man, Caradog, at the second *raptus*, she eventually consented to the Norman monks at Shrewsbury and Chester in their translation of her body. As with legal cases of *raptus* in medieval England, her consent, shown through her miracles, led to her legal marriage with her Norman abductors. Their marriage incorporated Winifred's identity into the Norman custom of the veneration of saints, including the translation of relics.

Winifred's Welsh identity was thus assimilated into Englishness. Lewis examines the process of veneration of the universal saints as English saints by applying a theory of 'the formulation of Britishness into Englishness'.⁷⁸ The formula is proposed by

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 78.

⁷⁷ Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 35-37.

⁷⁸ Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', pp. 214-15; See also Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives, History and National Identity in Late Medieval England', pp. 160-70.

Patricia Clare Ingham in her postcolonial readings of Arthurian legends, especially Caxton's attempts to appropriate Arthur's Britishness as an English history.⁷⁹ Ingham argues that Arthur's Englishness is built upon the continuity of time and geography with Britain. In other words, the past Britain in which Arthur lived is the same as the present England in which Caxton wrote the Prologue to Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* in 1485.⁸⁰ Lewis states, in her discussions of the veneration of Katherine of Alexandria and Ursula as local saints in medieval England, that 'although Katherine and Ursula lived and died before "England" even existed, the fact of their being British means that they, like the male saints alongside whom they appear here, are also English, or at the very least they somehow "belong" to England'.⁸¹ This idea of subsuming 'being British' into 'being English', or, more simply, that being British *was* being English, is also applicable to Winifred. Before the translation, Winifred's Wales was not contiguous with England. Caradog is somehow presented as an English intruder into a Welsh female body, and because of their disconnection, the English monks needed to negotiate with Wales, as written in the *translatio* of Winifred. Yet through the translation, first of her body and then of her texts, just like Arthur's body, Winifred crosses both land and text, making a link between two places, Wales and England.⁸² In this way, the English monks possess Welsh history written on Winifred's body.

The mapping of geography is one of the features that the legends of Winifred share. Her *vitae* contain various migrations: her severed head moves from the place where

⁷⁹ Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2001), pp. 192-226.

⁸⁰ Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, pp. 195-96.

⁸¹ Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', p. 215.

⁸² Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, p. 196.

she is decapitated to the front of the church (*Vita secunda, Festial*), and her transfer from one nunnery to another. On the larger scale, there are also episodes of Winifred's chasuble, delivered from Holywell to Beuno in Ireland (*Gilte Legende, Golden Legend*), her pilgrimage to Rome (*Vita prima*), and the translation of her relics from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury. However, as is the case with the *vita* of Æthelthryth, the *SEL vita* deals with the episode of Winifred's regional movements without giving any specific place names. Instead, it presents a vague image of the geography in which the text is set, by omitting details found in other versions of Winifred's legend, either in Latin or English.

As Gregory discusses, there seems, at first glance, little wonder that the representation of Winifred in the *SEL* is more inclined to depict her as an 'English' saint, given the characteristics of the *SELS*, especially in the context of MS B, which collects more native saints of medieval England.⁸³ However, the way in which the *SEL vita* presents Winifred is so ambiguous that it leaves doubts about the text's formation of a national saint in the figure of Winifred. Despite the richness of geographical details in the original legends, the *SEL* hagiographer of Winifred, just like the *vita* of Æthelthryth, does not provide specific place names to indicate the localities of this legend. What is strikingly different from Æthelthryth, whose local identities are suppressed to highlight that of Ely, is that the narrator of the *SEL vita* of Winifred remains silent not only about her Welsh local identity, but, most interestingly, even about her English connections. The *vita* does not include her translation either, which as a genre is by nature concerned with the travelling of a saint's body, closely related to geographical details. Compared to other *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon female saints

⁸³ See Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 279-82.

in the *SELS*, whose localities vary, Winifred's identity is rather passively presented through the process of de-localisation, whereas Anglo-Saxon female saints are clearly and closely connected with their local places.

The only geographical reference in the *SEL vita* of Winifred is to the 'king of Englund' (l. 2) when describing the father of Caradog. Winifred in the *SEL vita* is not given her locality other than that she was almost raped by this son of the King of 'Englund'. It is also of particular note that the *SEL* narrator does not refer to his name, Caradog, but to 'a fool' (l. 4) and 'þis fool child' (l. 25), whereas contemporary Middle English *vitae*, such as the supplementary *Gilte Legende*, *Festial*, or Bokenham's, mentions this Welsh name. A tormentor's local identity is important in the legends of female saints, as the power relationship between the two sexes can transfer to a gendered relationship between two locations, as in the *vita* of Mildred, who is desired by a French knight and bullied by a French abbess at a French nunnery. The reference to Caradog as a son of the English king can similarly be read as the invasion of Welsh female body by an English man in the form of rape. Yet, it is also of note that the *SEL* hagiographer seems to hesitate to present such a view, emphasising instead that the king himself is a good king and inserting his personal comments about the king's son that '...his sone was a fool, þilke tyme nas – / & þat men seþ wel ofte also þingkep me, / þerfore wel is þe child þat may I-þe, be fadir what he be' (ll. 4-6). Moreover, Caradog is not a prince of England, but merely a son of the English king, and in some versions, such as Bokenham's, he is cursed over generations. The *SEL vita*'s careful treatment of Caradog as a son of the English king seems designed to avoid the formation of a binary opposition between Wales and England. Winifred's body is not presented as the land to be invaded by the English; instead, it becomes a place of negotiation between the two countries.

Although no places are specified, an episode telling of Beuno's departure from Gwytherin for a monastery also suggests the geographical expansion of the Winifred legend in the *SEL vita*. The *SEL vita* does not describe the place for which Beuno leaves, but only mentions an 'oþer contre' (l. 67), whereas *Gilte Legende* and Caxton specify Beuno's destination as Ireland. The *SEL vita* does give further details about Beuno's destination, stating that the stream of the well sends her chasuble to Beuno who is in 'þritty myle & mo' (l. 86) away from Winifred's spring in Holywell. These clues, 'oþer contre' and 'þritty myle & mo', seem sufficient to make the audience associate Beuno's destination with England. Although the word 'contre' does not necessarily indicate a nation in Middle English, and 'þritty myle' may not indicate a specific distance between Gwytherin and Beuno's monastery, but rather suggest a certain remoteness between them, it is possible to cross over a border between Wales and England within thirty miles from Holywell, if Beuno departs to the east. More specifically, this same distance from Holywell reaches the Welsh Marches: there is the Abbey of St Werburga in Chester about fifteen miles to the east; Shrewsbury Abbey is about forty four miles to the southeast. The episode of the miraculous delivery of Winifred's chasuble to Beuno thus also suggests an important geographic connection between these two different places.

In the subsuming of British into English, the structure of the relationship between English and Welsh was not symmetrical but rather transitional. It is necessary to consider the veneration of Winifred both in Holywell and Shrewsbury as a continuum rather than in such a binary, oppositional way as 'Welsh' versus 'English'. At the narrative level, as discussed above, the well serves as a miraculous conduit linking Winifred in Wales and Beuno in another land. This link between Wales and England can also be seen in the medieval cult of Winifred. There existed a pilgrimage route

between Holywell and Shrewsbury; one of the most famous pilgrims was Henry V. According to Adam of Usk, the king walked the road barefoot in 1416.⁸⁴ By that time, Holywell and Shrewsbury had established a mutually beneficial relationship in terms of attracting pilgrims to the two different shrines of Winifred.

The relationship between two towns venerating the same saint – the old place where a saint was consecrated and the new place to which the saint is taken away – leads them to often regard each other as rivals once the *furta sacra* has happened. Geary demonstrates that behind monastic thefts in the Middle Ages there were ‘competition and animosity’ and ‘controversy and rivalry’.⁸⁵ In the *furta sacra* of Saint Foy, whose relics were stolen by a monk of Conques from Agen in the ninth century, her miracles were continuously performed in the new town, Conques, rather than in her original town, Agen, after her translation. As a result of these miracles, Conques attracted a number of pilgrims, and flourished more than Agen.⁸⁶ The old town, which formerly enjoyed the patronage of Foy, became somewhat abandoned by the saint herself.

Winifred, however, does not forsake her original Welsh town. The translation of Winifred from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury is different from such relationships delineated in the *furta sacra*, even though it is considered as *raptus*. The town’s relationship in terms of the veneration of Winifred seems more like cooperation than competition, since Winifred distributes her movable and unmovable properties between both towns. The Shrewsbury monks consider Wales to be the place where

⁸⁴ *Chronicon Adæ de Usk, A. D. 1377-1421*, 2nd edn, ed. by Edward Maunde Thompson (London: Frowde, 1904), p. 129 and p. 313.

⁸⁵ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 60-61.

⁸⁶ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 59.

many bodies of saints are buried, and see those bodies as natural resources for exploitation. Although the *furta sacra*, like *raptus*, of Winifred, is concerned with her body, Winifred also has a shrine, the well in Holywell, which was originally formed from her blood at the decapitation, but now is part of the natural landscape. The veneration of Winifred is divided into outdoor and indoor cult sites, and her relics are distributed to two different shrines, one in each town: her bones in Shrewsbury, which can be removed, and a well in Holywell, which is rooted in the original site, and thus cannot be removed. In fact, North Wales had more cult sites of Winifred in natural surroundings, such as Beuno's stone, to which his chasuble was delivered by Winifred, and other stones which retain Winifred's blood stains, and on which fragrant moss appeared afterwards. The *SEL vita* also depicts the stones which are spattered with blood as well as her miraculous spring as 'a tokene of here martirdom' (l. 44), venerated by local people. Robert's *vita* includes such topographical descriptions as 'even today [it] remains in the stream of the spring and is called "Saint Beuno's stone" by the inhabitants of the place' (p. 42; 'usque hodie in rivo fontis manet, et lapis sancti Beunoi ab incolis appellatur' p. 27); all of them also form the topography of Wales in the *vitae*.

Although in the Middle Ages, it seems that the two shrines had a mutual relationship, their post-medieval history indicates that each shrine followed a different path. The shrine in Shrewsbury, made of stone and with carvings of Winifred, Beuno, and Saint John, is more artificial and material, suggesting the vulnerability of an indoor cult site. The shrine at Shrewsbury Abbey was destroyed along with Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, and now remains only as a fragment of stone, with her bones lost. By contrast, Holywell regained its importance as a centre of her cult. St Winefride's Well survived the Reformation, and flourished not only as a place for

pilgrimage, but also as a centre of Catholic Christianity.⁸⁷

Comparing it to *furta sacra*, I have argued that the translation of Winifred's body and texts is a form of *raptus*. The history of Winifred's cult, even including her post-medieval veneration, however, suggests that the translation of Winifred does not fit into a typical story of *furta sacra*. The distribution of her relics, both removable and unremovable, in nature and in body, between two different shrines, marks a significant difference from the conventional *furta sacra* and the relationship between two towns thereafter. The acts of medieval translation involved various tensions between body, land, and history, and these struggles could contain the dangers of violence against the one translated. Although the bodily translation of Winifred is seen as a male attempt to control the female body, as represented by medieval *raptus*, in Robert of Shrewsbury's *translatio*, the textual translation of Winifred in the *SEL vita* actually presents a link between England and Wales, and Winifred herself takes on an important role as a conduit that flows through the translation of her text and body.

⁸⁷ On the post-medieval history of Holywell and St Winefride's Well, see Pritchard, *St Winefride, her Holy Well and the Jesuit Mission*, pp. 90-403; Colin Haydon, 'St Winifred, Bishop Fleetwood and Jacobitism', in *Saint and Sanctity*, ed. by Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon, *Studies in Church History*, 47 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), pp. 295-306.

Conclusion

The *vitae* of five medieval monastic women present their own distinctive ways of constructing gender and locality, but they also show similar patterns. In the construction of their gender, influences from the *vitae* of classical virgin martyrs remain strong in most *vitae* of monastic women. The comparison with classical virgin martyr legends, however, demonstrates that the *vitae* of medieval insular women follow the classical models in part, but also most significantly, depart at times from the tradition. While the *vita* of Winifred, for example, incorporates a whole narrative of the martyrdom into the *vita* of a medieval abbess, those of Frideswide and Mildred transform specific topoi of classical virgin martyr legends into their specific contexts. The *vitae* of medieval insular women are modelled on universal saints, and yet contextualise these topoi in the narratives of their cloistered life, as featured in the *vitae* of Mildred and Edburga. Their *vitae* also characteristically depict various places, not only English towns such as Oxford, Ely, Minster-in-Thamet, and Winchester, but also the Welsh towns Holywell and Gwytherin, and even the foreign town of Chelles in France. The various different localities are illustrated using different landscapes, such as urban settings in the *vitae* of Frideswide and insular ones in the *vita* of Æthelthryth, which are often connected with their virgin bodies.

The virgin body of a medieval insular female saint is the place where gender intersects with locality. As is the case with classical virgin martyr legends, their gender as virgins becomes more evident when they are threatened sexually, often in the form of attempted rape. Rape is a recurring theme in the *vitae* of medieval monastic women. Except for Edburga, who is threatened by her sister nuns rather than by a man, all four monastic women are continuously endangered by literal and metaphorical rape,

sometimes in the name of marriage. Yet what differentiates medieval female saints from classical virgin martyrs is that their monastic virginity is most evidently depicted with symbols of enclosure in their local contexts. Because of their cloistered life, the virginity of monastic women is imagined in terms of various forms of enclosed space. Also, as in the case of Frideswide and Mildred, their opponents often appear as intruders who attempt to break into their monastic enclosure. Although images of enclosure are similarly observed in classical virgin martyr legends, medieval women's enclosure not only symbolises the impermeable bodies of these medieval virgins, but, as is the case with the *vitae* of Frideswide and Æthelthryth, it metonymically represents their nunneries, their towns of patronage, and eventually their insular nation, England. Although their bodies are impermeable, the enclosed spaces imagined at various levels also reveal their vulnerability.

As is shown in Chapter 5, relationships between gender and locality are seen in the acts of translation. Translation of relics is another common theme in the hagiography of medieval saints, often accompanying detailed local information. In the *SELS*, the *vitae* of Æthelthryth and Edburga contain the *translationes*, by which their holy bodies become more strengthened in their original places or connected with other new places. Yet, as we see in the example of Winifred, who is first nearly raped and then posthumously abducted, the *translatio* can also be read as a narrative of rape/*raptus*. The idea of translation as rape is applicable, in the further broader contexts of the appropriation and nationalisation of these early medieval local women.

Although this thesis has argued that locality is one of central themes in the *vitae* of native saints in the *SELS*, nationalism that extends beyond regionalism is also one of the most controversial topics, and remains at stake. Late medieval literature, such as chronicles and romances, depict the formation of England and national identity after

the Conquest. Hagiography most consciously deals with England and the English people, more than other literary genres, through depicting the *vitae* of native saints of the British Isles. The *SELS* have such a nationalistic nature, compiling a number of native saints, and thus they contain important texts for discussing the construction of nationalism in late medieval England. As noted in the Introduction, scholars such as Renee Hamelinck, Klaus P. Jankofsky, Thorlac Turville-Petre, and Jill Frederick have analysed the *SEL vitae* of native male saints in order to explore the formation of national identity. However, as Sarah Breckenridge, in her discussions on the *SEL vita* of Kenelm, points out, these studies place great emphasis on nationalism, meaning that the regionalism of the *SELS*, especially centring on Worcestershire, is dismissed.¹ As Olsen's recent study on native female saints in the post-Conquest Latin and Middle English legends, including some of the *SEL vitae*, suggests, the roles of native female saints in the formation of late medieval national identity should be explored in more depth, along with the elucidation of various localities.² The *SELS*, especially those manuscripts containing more English local saints, map the nation through various saints with various local backgrounds, and native female saints are also involved in this programme of depicting England by their localities. Reading the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon and British female saints also contributes to revealing a late medieval view of the nation consisting of various localities represented by saints from the *SELS*.

Along with national identity, writing a national history is also one of the concerns which the *SELS* might have had. In reading the Middle English *vitae* of early medieval

¹ Breckenridge, 'Mapping Identity in the *SEL*', in *Rethinking the 'SELS'*, ed. by Blurton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 329-46 (p.335)

² Olsen, 'Questions of Identity: Rewriting Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in Post-Conquest England', pp. 172-82; 'Women and Englishness', pp. 1-9

saints, we must be aware of the temporal differences between the ages of saints and their texts later produced in vernacular languages. Scholars examine the vernacular *vitae* of pre-Conquest saints as important sources indicating the late medieval understanding of the Anglo-Saxon past.³ The *vitae* of early medieval saints, including holy nuns and abbesses, suggest various ways of looking back on the pre-Conquest past, as well as the hagiographers' attempts to build up a link between the past and their present. The past imagined in the *vitae* of five monastic women in the *SELS* is not monolithically Anglo-Saxon, but mixed with French and Welsh history, as we saw in the *vitae* of Mildred and Winifred. The construction of history, as well as of gender and locality, is now an upcoming issue in studies of the *SELS*. As their variety suggests, the *SELS* are texts open for the further exploration of these issues in late medieval England.

³ Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives, History and National Identity in Late Medieval England', pp. 160-70; 'History, Hagiography and Rewriting the Past', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Salih, pp. 122-40; Camp, *Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England*.

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¹ I follow the sigla used in Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the 'SEL'*.

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